

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

----- X

TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Jointly with

COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE

And

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

----- X

May 27, 2025
Start: 10:04 a.m.
Recess: 5:19 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: Justin L. Brannan
Chairperson

Sandy Nurse
Chairperson

Alexa Avilés
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Diana I. Ayala
Gale A. Brewer
Selvena N. Brooks-Powers
David M. Carr
Amanda Farías

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

Kamillah Hanks
Crystal Hudson
Farah N. Louis
Francisco P. Moya
Chi A. Ossé
Keith Powers
Yusef Salaam
Pierina Ana Sanchez
Althea V. Stevens
Nantasha M. Williams
Julie Won
Erik D. Bottcher
Carmen N. De La Rosa
Shahana K. Hanif
Rita C. Joseph
Shekar Krishnan
Shaun Abreu
Tiffany L. Cabán
Christopher Marte
Mercedes Narcisse
Lincoln Restler

Francis Torres
Department of Correction First Deputy
Commissioner

Faizan Zubair
Department of Correction Assistant Commissioner
for Financial Operations and Budget
Administration

Sherrieann Rembert
Department of Correction Bureau Chief, Chief of
Staff

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

Alexandria Maldonado
Department of Correction Assistant Commissioner
of Strategic Initiatives

Nell McCarty
Department of Correction Deputy Commissioner of
Programming

James Saunders
Department of Correction Deputy Commissioner of
Health Affairs

James Conroy
Department of Correction Deputy Commissioner of
Legal Matters, General Counsel

Fritz Frage
Department of Correction Senior Deputy
Commissioner

James Boyd
Department of Correction Deputy Commissioner of
Strategic Operations

Kevin Doherty
Department of Correction Deputy Commissioner of
Facility Maintenance and Repair Division

Manuel Castro
Mayor's Office Immigrant Affairs Commissioner

Lorena Lucero
Mayor's Office Immigrant Affairs Deputy
Commissioner of Programs and Policy

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

Jasniya Sanchez
Mayor's Office Immigrant Affairs Deputy
Commissioner of Administrative and Strategic
Initiatives

Monique Francis
Interim Executive Director of CUNY Citizenship
Now

Carmen de Leon
President of Local 768

Karla Ostolaza
Immigration Practice at Bronx Defenders

Catherine Gonzalez
Brooklyn Defender Services

Deborah Lee
Immigration Law Unit at Legal Aid Society

Jodi Ziesemer
NYLAG

Luis Mancheno
Citywide Director of Legal Services NYC

Ernie Collette
Immigration Law Project at Mobilization for
Justice

Sophie Dalsimer
Health Justice Program at NYLPI

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

Keriann Pauls
TakeRoot Justice

Sierra Kraft
ICARE Coalition

Sarah Nolan
Kids in Need of Defense

Grace Day
The Door

Michelle Sencion
Safe Passage Project

Lauren Migliaccio
Immigrant Justice Court

Margaret Martin
Catholic Charities Community Services New York

Herold Dasque
Haitian American United for Progress

Robert Agyemang
Vice President of Advocacy at New York
Immigration Coalition

Aracelis Lucero
MASA Executive Director

Riva Shang
Asian American Federation

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

Madeleine Bravo
La Colmena

Jose Quebrado

Rodolfo Pardalla [sp?]
Labor Justice Project

Mamadou Balde [sp?]

Alejandro Grajales
Workers Justice Project

Armary Perez
Workers Justice Project

Nilbia Coyote
New Immigrant Community Empowerment

Natalia Aristizabal
Make the Road New York

Paulina Cohen
New York City Anti-Violence Project

Julian Colon
Center for Family Life Sunset Park

Tim Sheehan
Center for Family Life Sunset Park

Jimin Wu Li [sp?]
Chinese-American Planning Council

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

Zachary Katznelson
Independent Rikers Commission

Sarita Daftary
Freedom Agenda

Jennifer Parish
Urban Justice Center Mental Health Project

Roberto Ponce
Hot Bread Kitchen

Megan French-Marcelin
NYC Alternatives to Incarceration and Reentry
Coalition

Scarlett Thompson
NYC Alliance Against Sexual Assault, Outsmart
NYC

Jasmine Joseph
NYC Alliance Against Sexual Assault, Outsmart
NYC

Andrea Rodriguez
NYC Alliance Against Sexual Assault, Outsmart
NYC

Yanki Tshering
Accompany Capital

Raul Rivera

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

Airenakhue Omoragbon
African Community Together

Daniele Gerard
Children's Rights

Donna Hilton
A Little Piece of Light

Sophia Gurule
Association of Legal Advocates

Christopher Leon Johnson
Worker Justice Project

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

10

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good morning. Good
3 morning. Welcome to the New York City Council
4 Executive Budget hearing on the Committee on Finance
5 joint with Criminal Justice and Immigration. If you
6 have any phones, please put it on vibrate or silent
7 mode. If you have any food or drinks, please finish
8 it in the rotunda. If you are testifying today,
9 please fill out a slip with the Sergeant at Arms.
10 Thank you. Chairs, we may begin.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you,
12 Sergeant. [gavel] Okay, good morning and welcome to
13 the 11th day and the final week of FY26 Executive
14 Budget hearings. I'm Council Member Justin Brannan.
15 I Chair the Committee on Finance. Today's hearings
16 will begin with the Department of Corrections,
17 followed by the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.
18 I'm pleased to be joined for the first portion of
19 this hearing by my colleague Council Member Sandy
20 Nurse who chairs the Committee on Criminal Justice.
21 We've been joined so far this morning by Council
22 Member Sanchez, Louis, Carr, and Moya. Welcome to
23 First Deputy Commissioner Francis Torres and your
24 team. Thank you for joining us today to answer our
25 questions. On May 1st, 2025, the administration

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING> 11

2 released their Executive Financial Plan for FY26 to
3 29 with a proposed FY26 budget of \$115.1 billion.
4 DOC's proposed FY26 budget of \$1.21 billion
5 represents less than one percent of the
6 administration's proposed budget in the Executive
7 Plan. This is \$869,000 less or 0.1 percent from the
8 amount originally budgeted in the Preliminary Plan
9 back in January. The decrease is attributed to
10 staffing transfers, the decrease in the heat, light,
11 and power budget and motor fuel. The Executive Plan
12 also includes an additional baselining for collective
13 bargaining and the Lightning Law Discovery sharing
14 platform. As March 2025, DOC had a little over 1,500
15 vacancies relative to its FY25 budgeted headcount. My
16 questions today will largely focus on DOC's staffing
17 levels, the large increase in overtime, the capital
18 budget, vacancy rates, agency program funding, and
19 general budget changes. But I now want to turn it
20 over to my co-chair for this hearing, Council Member
21 Nurse, for her opening statement.

22 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Good morning
23 everyone. Thank you, Chair Brannan. Thank you to
24 all the DOC leadership who have joined us today.
25 Please give our regards to the Commissioner. I hope

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

12

2 she's feeling well. Today, I plan to focus on how
3 the Mayor's Executive Budget for the Department of
4 Correction supports the overall plan to close Rikers
5 and transition to the borough-based jail system, as
6 well as how holistic criminal justice reform policies
7 provide appropriate resource to ensure proper
8 programming is provided, and divert people away from
9 the criminal justice system. In the Fiscal 2026
10 Executive Plan, DOC has a total budget of \$1.21
11 billion which supports 8,805 budgeted positions. The
12 plan includes several changes including funding for
13 overtime adjustments, virtual visitation platforms,
14 and federal funding for opioid and substance abuse
15 programs among other important topics which I plan to
16 explore today in my line of questions. The Mayor's
17 Office of Criminal Justice recently released an
18 update to the 2019 Points of Agreement which is a
19 list of commitments that must be met in order to be
20 able to properly and safely close Rikers Island. I
21 intend to ask about the DOC's involvement and clarify
22 many of the updates that are directly impacted by the
23 policies and actions of the Department. I want to
24 thank our committee staff for their hard work,
25 Financial Analyst, Casey Lajszky, Counsel Jeremy

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

13

2 Whiteman [sp?], Legislative Policy Analyst, Natalie
3 Meltzer, and thank you to my Chief of Staff Samori
4 Toure [sp?], Legislative Director, Ryan Hickey.
5 We've been joined by Council Member Keith Powers.
6 I'll turn it back over to Chair Brannan.

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. We've
8 also been joined by Council Member Hanif. Before we
9 get started, I also want to take a quick moment to
10 thank the entire Council Finance Division staff for
11 their efforts in preparing these hearings over the
12 past three weeks, especially Jack Storey, Casey
13 Lajszky [sp?], and Alexis LaFrese [sp?] for today's
14 hearing. I'm now going to turn it over to my
15 Committee Counsel Brian Sarfo [sp?] who can swear
16 everyone in and we can get started.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good morning. Do you
18 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing
19 but the truth before this committee and to respond
20 honestly to Council Member questions? Deputy
21 Commissioner Torres? Senior Deputy Frage? Chief
22 Rembert? Deputy Commissioner Conroy? Deputy
23 Commissioner Boyd? Director Maldonado? Assistant
24 Commissioner Zubair? Assistant Commissioner McCarty?

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

14

2 Deputy Doddard [sp?]? And Deputy Commissioner
3 Saunders? You may begin.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: You can begin.
5 Thanks.

6 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: Good
7 morning, Chair Nurse, Chair Brannan, and members of
8 the Committee on Criminal Justice and Finance. I am
9 Francis Torres, First Deputy Commissioner of the New
10 York City Department of Correction. My colleagues
11 and I are here to discuss the Department's Executive
12 Budget for Fiscal Year 2026 and what lies ahead for
13 the agency in the coming year. When Lynelle
14 Maginley-Liddie was appointed Commissioner, she
15 committed herself to leading this agency under the
16 guiding principles of service, compassion and respect
17 so that both staff and people in custody have their
18 voices uplifted and feel safe in our jails. She has
19 made it clear to staff on all levels that she expects
20 the same from them, and they have delivered, no
21 matter the challenges we are facing. Most recently,
22 the Department has experienced an unexpected increase
23 in the census, driven in large part by the New York
24 State Department of Corrections and community
25 supervision temporarily suspending intake of state

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

15

2 ready [sic] individuals due to the Wildcat strike.

3 Today, we have over 7,600 individuals in custody,
4 compared to approximately 6,300 this time last year.

5 In contrast, we have approximately 5,900 uniformed

6 members of service to manage the jails and other

7 critical operations, compared to over 6,200 last

8 year. Despite this, dedicated staff across all

9 divisions have risen to the call and throughout this

10 challenge we have ensured that all people coming into

11 our care have a bed and can be safely housed. During

12 this period, important violence indicators have

13 continued to trend downward. We continue to

14 collaborate with partners throughout the criminal

15 justice system to ensure people in custody are moving

16 expeditiously through the court process and are not

17 lingering in our custody longer than they should.

18 Our Commissioner has said it before, and I will say

19 it on her behalf this morning-- heroes work here at

20 the New York Department of Correction. We remain

21 laser-focused on recruiting and supporting staff to

22 do this challenging and important work. In March of

23 this year, over 100 new recruits graduated from the

24 DOC Academy and became part of the boldest [sic]

25 family, and we have a new class starting at the end

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

16

2 of this week. Last week, we held an exam for
3 Correction Captains and hope to promote dedicated
4 members of service into critical front line
5 leadership positions where they will support and
6 mentor correction officers and help shape the culture
7 of our agency. Our Commissioner has stated
8 repeatedly that leadership matters. All promotional
9 classes for supervisors have several leadership
10 development components built into the curriculum.
11 With a servant leadership focus as a foundation for
12 all leadership development within the agency. It's
13 incredibly important that we foster the next
14 generation of correctional leaders to carry the
15 important work of reform forward for decades to come.
16 At the beginning of this month we celebrated National
17 Correctional Officers and Employee's Week. As part of
18 the celebrations and in furtherance of our efforts to
19 support our staff, we opened four additional wellness
20 centers to promote more opportunities for them to
21 focus on their wellbeing, recharge and show up as
22 their best selves. It is imperative that we uplift
23 and honor the dedicated public servants who give so
24 much of themselves to keep our city safe, not just
25 for one week, but each and every day. Finally,

2 before turning the budget, we would like to highlight
3 several exciting initiatives that are coming to
4 fruition in the next fiscal year. We have been
5 working diligently to meaningfully expand programs
6 and services in critical areas which were chosen
7 based on a number of factors, but most importantly
8 input from people in custody and our staff.
9 Providers have been selected, and we anticipate an
10 announcement soon with services beginning in the
11 coming weeks. We're also looking forward to rolling
12 out Lightning Law discovery sharing platform.
13 Lightning Law will allow the efficient and
14 confidential sharing of records between clients and
15 their attorneys through electronic devices. We are
16 hopeful that these technological innovation will
17 support speedier case processing and better justice
18 outcomes, which benefits everybody. We are procuring
19 a new virtual visitation platform aimed at improving
20 the visit process for attorneys and those visiting
21 their loved ones in jail. This new platform will
22 allow attorneys to more easily schedule virtual
23 meetings with incarcerated clients and discuss case
24 updates. These measures will help modernize our
25 jails, provide better access to critical services,

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

18

2 and ultimately improve outcomes for those who are in
3 our care. Now, we will briefly turn to the Fiscal
4 Year 2026 Executive Budget. As of the Fiscal Year
5 2026 Financial Plan, the Department's budget is \$1.3
6 billion. The vast majority of this, 87 percent is
7 allocated for personnel services, and 13 percent for
8 other than personnel services. The Fiscal Year 2026
9 Executive Budget increased by \$288 million compared
10 to fiscal year 2025 Adopted Budget of \$1.0 billion.
11 Some of the increases of the budget of the Executive
12 Budget include a federal grant funding for the Bureau
13 of Justice Assistance Comprehensive Opioid Stimulant
14 and Substance Use site-based program. With
15 allowances of \$10,000 in Fiscal Year 2025 and
16 additional \$586,000 in Fiscal Year 2026, and \$340,00
17 in Fiscal Year 2027, respectively. This grant will
18 help expand substance misuse services for the
19 Department's high-risk, high-needs population through
20 the additional five substance misuse counselors. We
21 receive an additional \$1 million baseline funding
22 beginning in fiscal year 2026 for Lightning Law.
23 Also, in Fiscal Year 2026 we received \$1.4 million
24 for the virtual visitation web-based platform that
25 will improve virtual visits. The Fiscal Year 2025

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

19

2 Executive Capital Commitment Plan totals \$14.6
3 billion which covers Fiscal Years 2025 through 2035.
4 As of the Fiscal Year 2026, Executive Financial Plan,
5 most of the capital funding is tied to the borough-
6 based jail program which total \$13.9 billion over the
7 10-year plan and is allocated as follows: Brooklyn
8 facility, \$2.3 billion; Manhattan facility \$4.1
9 billion; Bronx facility \$3.1 billion; Queens facility
10 \$4 billion. We continue to work diligently to
11 attract and retain both civilian and uniform staff.
12 The total authorized headcount is 8,810 which
13 includes 7,060 uniformed positions and 1,750 civilian
14 positions. Our actual uniformed staffing levels
15 remain well below our authorized headcount, and the
16 Department plans to use the new needs approved for
17 recruitment and advertisement in the Preliminary
18 Budget to aggressively advertise and utilize
19 marketing strategies to promote recruitment. We
20 continue to welcome the Council's support promoting
21 job opportunities within their networks. As we look
22 at the year ahead, we celebrate the heroes that work
23 at the Department. When we think of a hero, we think
24 of someone who is courageous and selfless, someone
25 who puts other's needs before their own. That's what

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

20

2 a hero does. That's who Correction Officers are.
3 They are the backbone of our collective achievements
4 over the past 130 years, and they will continue to be
5 a powerful force for hope and transformation in the
6 years to come. Over the past fiscal year we have
7 made progress in spite of many challenges, because
8 that's what the boldest do. The work we do is
9 difficult and yet crucial. It is vital to this city.
10 Commissioner Maginley-Liddie, our team and I and all
11 the heroes that work alongside us remain committed to
12 this important work. Thank you for the opportunity
13 to testify today. My colleagues and I are available
14 to answer your questions.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you,
16 Commissioner. Quickly, we've been joined by Council
17 Members Powers, Narcisse, and Ayala. I want to dive
18 right into staffing and overtime. So, last year,
19 DOC's Adopted Budget included \$132.7 million for
20 overtime. At the end of the fiscal year, the
21 Department's overtime spending was apartment \$281
22 million. In the Executive Plan, the Department has
23 increased their personnel budget by \$192 million
24 which DOC has stated it is currently around 95

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

21

2 percent overtime funding. So, how much of this
3 additional funding has been allocated for overtime?

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: Good
5 morning, Chair Brannan.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Good morning.

7 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: If you
8 allow me, I would like our Assistant Commissioner
9 assigned to finance, Assistant Commissioner Zubair to
10 go into the specifics.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Sure.

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ZUBAIR: Good
13 morning. Thank you for the question. Faizan Zubair,
14 Assistant Commissioner for Financial Operations and
15 Budget Administration. We have approximately \$180
16 million allocated towards overtime funding with the
17 new needs that we received. Not new needs, but
18 additional overtime funding.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. And then at
20 the end of the fiscal year, your overtime spending
21 was around \$281 million, is that right?

22 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ZUBAIR: That is
23 correct.

24

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

22

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. So, that's
3 \$100 million less than this \$180. Do you think
4 you're going to blow past that?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ZUBAIR: Our
6 expected projection by the end of the fiscal year is
7 approximately \$337, so yes, we do anticipate that.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. So, wait,
9 explain-- that \$337 million number is what?

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ZUBAIR: Is our
11 anticipated Fiscal Year 25 overtime expenditures.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And was the
13 Department's annual pattern of actual overtime
14 spending doubling the budgeted amount the main reason
15 for the increase?

16 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ZUBAIR: I'm
17 sorry, can you repeat the question? Can you--

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Was DOC's annual
19 pattern of actual overtime spending doubling the
20 budgeted amount the reason for that increase?

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ZUBAIR: I'm not
22 100 percent sure. It might be. I'm not 100 percent
23 sure, I'm sorry.

24

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

23

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I mean, is it still
3 a priority for this administration to lower overtime
4 spending?

5 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: Chair,
6 if I may? You're absolutely correct. Every effort
7 is being made by our department to ensure compliance
8 with mayoral directive 2024-1. To explain to you
9 what initiatives we've established within our
10 department to reduce the overtime, I would like to
11 introduce you to Bureau Chief, Chief of Staff
12 Rembert, who will speak to our effort.

13 CHIEF REMBERT: Good morning. Thank you
14 for the question. I am Sherrieann Rembert, the Bureau
15 Chief, Chief of Staff, New York City Department of
16 Correction. As you know, sir, we are currently
17 facing a staffing crisis. The city halted hiring for
18 years, expecting a population decrease, but it has
19 only grown. Our agency operates the entire system,
20 not just for facilities, housing areas and/or cost of
21 hospital. We rely on all personnel for operation
22 efficiency. In calendar year of 2024, 634 uniformed
23 members of service attrited [sic]. That's-- out of
24 that is 578 Correction Officers, 44 Captains. As of
25 April of 2025, 212 Correction Officers are eligible

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

24

2 to retire. However, also in 2025 up until today 104
3 did retire. By the end of calendar year of 25, a
4 total of 419 additional Correction Officers will be
5 eligible to retire. By the end of calendar year
6 2026, a total of 716 additional Correction Officers
7 will be eligible to retire. We're saying all of
8 that. We continue to do everything possible to
9 reduce the overtime by keeping in mind it's paramount
10 to have a safe jail and ensuring our staff have a
11 quality of life and working diligently in balancing
12 safety, security for our persons in custody as well
13 as our staff. We are using a multipronged approach
14 working hand-in-hand to reduce overtime, implement
15 measures to optimize our staff coverage, enhance
16 operational efficiency, and maintain physical
17 discipline. So, we begin by reinforcing controls on
18 overtime usage which is tracked by the Office of
19 Administration. We assign a dedicated administrative
20 personnel tasked specifically with oversight and
21 management of our AWOLs and personal emergency. We
22 are developing an approval process for unauthorized
23 posts. The SCOC did help us out and collaborate with
24 us and they conducted a post-analysis of one our
25 facilities. We are waiting and standing by for

2 approval for that. We also re-strategized our
3 deployment's efforts. We enforce our biweekly
4 redeployment, assignment for personnels for ancillary
5 posts such as the hospitals, housing areas, scheduled
6 medical appointments, as well as mandated services.
7 We increase our redeployment frequency from one week,
8 weekly, to twice a week for our temporary duty
9 assignment officers. Also, we stagger the temporary
10 duty officers on the weekends one day a week and one
11 day on the weekends so that we have coverage on the
12 weekends which-- that would increase our-- that will
13 increase our housing area staffing ratio. We
14 collaborated with our OMAPs teams which is the Office
15 of Management Analysis and Planning to advance our
16 automated systems so that we get a dashboard so that
17 we see real time where we see where our staff are
18 doing triples to reduce the unstaffed posts and make
19 sure triples and overtime is managed effectively.
20 This dashboard actively assists commands in reducing
21 triple tours by identifying excessive hours promptly.
22 It also provides commanding leadership with immediate
23 visibility into leadership-- excuse me, into staffing
24 patterns facilitating proactive response and
25 intervention. We also have preapprovals for overtime

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

26

2 for staff members that are restricted for overtime.

3 So, before they go through overtime, they have to get

4 preapproved by the Office of Administration. The

5 Office of Administration is conducting audits to

6 ensure that all the aforementioned mentioned is in

7 compliance. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Back in the

9 Preliminary Budget hearing, you were asked if the

10 Department had conducted an analysis of how many

11 uniformed positions could be safely performed by

12 civilians. I think you told us at the time that

13 you'd have the numbers soon. Do you have the results

14 of that analysis? What did it find?

15 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: So, e

16 have worked with SCOC to do the staffing analysis for

17 the uniformed members. When it comes to our

18 civilian, we have civilian lines. We have

19 established a committee that continues to do that

20 analysis. We have, in fact, transitioned some

21 uniform members already back into the jails to assume

22 what we call significant PIC-facing posts. The

23 committee continues to work. The Deputy

24 Commissioners are leaders to each of the divisions--

25 have until the end of this month, meaning until the

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

27

2 end of this week, to basically do what they need in
3 order for us to then look into closely how it is that
4 we're able to remove uniformed members. But in
5 removing uniformed members, we need to ensure that we
6 have civilian lines that they can actually utilize to
7 replace those uniformed members. So, it is ongoing.
8 Chair Brannan, when we are in a better place, we'll
9 be more than happy to share with you and the rest of
10 the Committee.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. So, as of
12 March, we can see that there were around 244 vacant
13 civilian positions. Is that number still accurate,
14 or have any of those been filed?

15 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: As you
16 well know, the vacancies in civilians are very fluid.
17 You always have on-boarding of civilian staff and
18 those that retired or also moved to other agencies.
19 We still have approximately 250 vacancies. However,-
20 -

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] So,
22 you have more than you had in March.

23 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: Yes,
24 because of people either moving to different agencies
25 or retiring. The good thing is-- and I would like to

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

28

2 put that positive spin as we come to you this
3 morning, is that currently we have over 152 different
4 persons that are being on-boarded by our department,
5 and so they are in different stages of the hiring
6 process, meaning some of them are still being vetted
7 by our agency while others are being approved by OMB.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. So, the
9 Preliminary Plan included over \$4 million in baseline
10 funds for recruitment advertising for Correction
11 Officers. Will there be any recruitment funding or
12 any of that money used for civilian positions?

13 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: We are
14 still concentrating on the largest of forces that are
15 departing our agency which happens to be uniform--

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Which
17 area do you have the highest-- which area do you have
18 the highest vacancy?

19 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: The
20 highest vacancy that we have is the uniformed
21 members, sir.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, and what
23 about the civilian vacancy rates, what area?

24 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: So,
25 there are three specific areas that have a large one.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

29

2 That's facility maintenance, because of the different
3 labor trades that we have in place. The other one
4 happens to be the Division of Programs and Community
5 Partnerships, but the Deputy Commissioner has been
6 actively doing the job postings, doing the hiring
7 posts, as well as conducting interviews and
8 submitting the recommendations for hire. And then
9 followed by Health Affairs-- Health Affairs, the
10 challenge there is a little different. That's more
11 concentrating on cooks that are part of our
12 Nutritional Services Unit.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, I want to
14 talk a little bit about capital funding, and then I'm
15 going to turn it over to Chair Nurse. So, DOC
16 repeatedly responds that major renovations and
17 capital repairs are not possible due to the impending
18 closure of Rikers within the five-year life-span
19 requirement. Are you aware-- is DOC aware that the
20 Department can apply for waiver from the
21 Comptroller's Office to waive the five-year life-span
22 provision?

23 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ZUBAIR: Thank you
24 for the question. We are aware, and wherever we can,
25 we do seek a waiver.

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Have you applied
3 for that waiver?

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ZUBAIR: We have
5 applied to waivers not to the Comptroller's Office,
6 but to DCAS instead. That's usually where we reach
7 out to for our five-year span waivers.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So, are you saying
9 you're not eligible for capital funds in general?

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ZUBAIR: We're
11 not-- in general, we have capital funding to further
12 capital projects and improvements if we need to.
13 However, on average, whenever we seek additional
14 capital funding or approval for the ones, the capital
15 projects that we have, our waivers are not sufficient
16 because of the impending closure of Rikers.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Because I
18 believe that under Directive 10 you can apply for a
19 waiver to the Comptroller's Office and waive the
20 five-year life-span provision for capital projects.
21 Do you not agree with that? Assessment?

22 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ZUBAIR: We were
23 not aware of that, but we could look into it.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. We've been
25 joined by Council Members Marte, Restler, and Brooks-

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

31

2 Powers. I'm going to turn it over to Chair Nurse.

3 Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Thanks, Chair.

5 Before I ask a few questions on behalf of the
6 Speaker, I just want to clarify. So, what-- can you
7 give for the record the types of capital projects
8 that you've applied for a waiver to DCAS about and
9 just so we can understand the size of them?

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ZUBAIR: So, we
11 generally get waivers for every kind of capital
12 project going forward?

13 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Have you won any of
14 them?

15 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ZUBAIR: I'm
16 sorry?

17 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Have you been able to
18 move forward with any of them?

19 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ZUBAIR: In the
20 past we have, but recently-- for instance we'll take
21 fencing, for example. When we request waivers for
22 fencing, we are told that because of the impending
23 closure of Rikers, those waivers despite receiving
24 them they're not eligible anymore, and they're not--

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

32

2 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] Out
3 perimeter fencing?

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ZUBAIR: I'm
5 sorry?

6 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: For what type of
7 fencing, in the outside, exterior, or interior?

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ZUBAIR: I believe
9 it's perimeter fencing.

10 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. What other
11 types of large of capital that you've been rejected
12 for?

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ZUBAIR: Right now
14 it's just been that and it's been recently, but I
15 would have to look into it further to be able to--

16 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] It would
17 be great in the follow-up. Can you give us maybe
18 like the last two years of things that you've applied
19 for waivers on, big and small. Thank you. Questions
20 on behalf of the Speaker. We all are aware of the
21 Points of Agreement. I won't go into the preamble on
22 it. We just got wonderful Friday afternoon update
23 from MOCJ on the status update on those. Most of
24 those-- some of them are in the direct jurisdiction
25 of DOC, and I'd like to ask did you assist in

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

33

2 providing updates for your department to that update
3 that MOCJ gave us?

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: We're
5 going to have Assistant Commissioner Maldonado
6 address your question.

7 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Thank you.

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: Good
9 morning. My name is Alex Maldonado and I oversee the
10 borough-based jail program on behalf of the
11 Department, but also I participate in providing
12 updates to the Points of Agreement with our partners
13 at MOCJ.

14 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay, so you did--
15 yes, yes, in fact, you did insist in providing
16 updates for the Department for the one that came on
17 Friday?

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: Yes,
19 ma'am.

20 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. There's a
21 question here on-- are people in custody on Rikers
22 receiving five hours of programming every day as per
23 BOC's minimum standards?

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: I
25 would-- yes, they are, and I would turn it over to

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

34

2 our Deputy Commissioner for Programming, Nell McCarty
3 if you'd like further detail.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MCCARTY: Hello. My
5 name is Nell McCarty. I'm the Deputy Commissioner for
6 the Division of Programs and Community Partnerships.
7 So, thank you for your question. Yes, people in
8 custody are afforded access to five hours of
9 programming, but it's important to note that while
10 afforded, they have the opportunity to decline
11 engagement in certain programs. So, on any given day
12 based on what a person is opting in to engage in, it
13 may not look like they are engaging in five hours of
14 programming.

15 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. No, thank you
16 for that clarification. We just ask every time,
17 because we know that we've heard that not everyone is
18 getting access. We ask this pretty much every single
19 time. Before it had been questions of staffing and
20 capacity. So, for everybody who wants to opt in to
21 five hours of programming, is that available to them?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MCCARTY: There are
23 various mechanisms of programs that are available to
24 them.

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

35

2 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay, thank you. Has
3 the RFP for the new in-custody programming contracts
4 been posted yet?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MCCARTY: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: I think you mentioned
7 some of that in your testimony.

8 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: Yes,
9 actually, we're very happy and I'll have Deputy
10 Commissioner McCarty elaborate. What we thought was
11 going to be a very speedy process going through the
12 challenge base procurement has demonstrated that it
13 took a little longer, but DC McCarty will give you
14 the very good news.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MCCARTY: Yes. So,
16 they were posted on January 6th of 2025. The deadline
17 for the RFP was February 21st of 2025. We have
18 identified and selected vendors for each of the RFPs.
19 They have all been made aware that they have been
20 selected as the vendors, and we're working with them
21 closely on ensuring that we are closing the gap on
22 anything with their budget. Some of them actually
23 has proposed budgets, as an example, less than the
24 actual amount that they were awarded. So we're
25 working with them to make sure that they are using

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

36

2 all of the funds towards the RFP, and right now, the
3 stage that we're at is finalizing the mast agreements
4 which are currently-- we're working in collaboration
5 with the Mayor's Office of Contracting Services, or
6 MOCS, to ensure that those are finalized so that we
7 get registered as quickly as possible. That has
8 just, again, taken a little bit more time because of
9 the challenge based vehicle as being the first of its
10 kind procurement for human services in New York City,
11 but that being said, we are really excited to get
12 these off the ground rolling in early Fiscal 2026.

13 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: So, what's the value
14 of the services, the monetary value of all the
15 services that are going to be provided?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MCCARTY: In total,
17 it's approximately \$14 million, which again we plan
18 for Fiscal Year 26.

19 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: And that's about what
20 \$3-\$4 million short of what was cut like a couple
21 years ago from the programming that was provided.
22 So, what does the gap-- what have you eliminated in
23 programming that addresses that gap?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MCCARTY: While, this
25 funding is not a replacement of the \$17 million of

2 the PEG that was applied to division of Programs
3 budget, is it-- you know, it \$17 million that was the
4 PEG. So, this is \$14 million, so that's
5 approximately \$3 million of difference. But we would
6 really like to highlight that the programs that were
7 offered through the PEG for the targeted jail-based
8 services contract were insourced with our
9 department's counseling services.

10 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: No, I remember. We
11 had lengthy conversations here about that. Disagree
12 with the way you're describing it, but sure. It's a
13 decrease, and we talked about the decrease in
14 programming and the value. We understand all of the
15 insourcing and why it couldn't be done effectively,
16 and that's why we're back here. So, I was just
17 wondering if there was a difference in the type of
18 programming that accounts for that gap there.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MCCARTY: Well, not
20 that it counts for the gap, but I would say the
21 programming is generally different from the targeted
22 jail-based services contract. So, it's targeting
23 four core areas: supplemental education, which is
24 something that we've never pursued before in such a
25 large contract. It's also targeting trauma-informed

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

38

2 care, substance misuse programming and transitioanal
3 planning, and transportation. So, all of those are
4 new, or maybe transition planning is the closest that
5 you could get to what was the targeted jail-based
6 services contract.

7 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. For the April
8 and May updates provided for the category, develop
9 new training for Correction Officers, program staff
10 and healthcare staff, states that DOC and DHS
11 developed a situational awareness training module in
12 2020. Has this training been updated since? Just a
13 yes or no. We don't need a whole description of it.
14 Just a--

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: Hi, thank
16 you for that question. Deputy Commissioner James
17 Saunders. Specifically, to that question, I'm going
18 to have to say no, but I know that there's been other
19 training that has been offered.

20 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: I think
22 crisis intervention, de-escalation, CIT training that
23 has been provided, but we will have to get back to
24 you--

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

39

2 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] Yeah, if
3 you could send a write-up of what that training is--

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS:
5 [interposing] Okay.

6 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: that is kind of
7 complementing or supplementing that. And then for
8 PACE units, there was a commitment to double the
9 number of PACE units in DOC by the end of 2020. How
10 many PACE units are on Rikers today?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: So, from
12 2020 to today-- I think in 2020 we have five, and as
13 of today we currently have 10.

14 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: and how are we for
15 staffing? Do we have adequate staffing for the PACE
16 units?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: So,
18 staffing is a combination of uniformed staff and CHS
19 staff. So, I will have to let CHS staff discuss the
20 clinical side, and with respect to operations, I'll
21 let the operations folks discuss that. But with
22 respect to uniform, there is a higher number of
23 uniformed staff in that type of setting.

24 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. Thank you. In
25 terms of the formation of the Culture Change

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

40

2 Committee of the Justice Implementation Taskforce, it
3 said it was still in progress as of April. What is
4 the status of this committee?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: I
6 think the original imagining of the Culture Change
7 Committee kind of stalled with COVID and sort of the
8 staffing crisis that emerged afterwards, but we are
9 working with Commissioner Maginley-Liddie and our
10 partners at the administration as well as MOCJ to
11 reimagine what that looks like, understanding that
12 moving into the new borough-based jails would require
13 a shift for both our staff and our individuals in
14 custody, and so we're committed to finding a way to
15 work together better in the new facilities.

16 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: So, before the
17 reimagining, so just there's been no-- there's been
18 no committee formed, there's been no meeting?

19 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: There
20 were-- prior to my appointment there were-- the talks
21 had stalled, but we are reinvigorating that now.

22 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: So, no, there's been
23 no committee meeting ever.

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: Not
25 that I'm aware of.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

41

2 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. Just a few
3 more questions. Regarding ICE on Rikers, we've asked
4 every single time, have there been any further
5 discussions since our last hearing regarding ICE
6 opening or setting up operations on Rikers Island?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: Chair, as
8 the Council is aware, we're in current litigation
9 with the Council--

10 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] I
11 understand. We know.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: regarding
13 that, so we can't comment on negotiations, but right
14 now there's a stay to that. There's no negotiations
15 happening.

16 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: So, just to confirm,
17 there have been no further discussions since our last
18 hearing?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: Well, since
20 the last hearing there was, right, because that was
21 before the Executive Order was signed.

22 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Well, that was my
23 question.

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: Yeah.

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

42

2 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: So, can you tell us
3 when that was?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: Well, that
5 was on the-- just proceeding. I forget the exact date
6 when the Executive Order was signed. I have it
7 somewhere, but proceeding that we had conversations--

8 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] Okay.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: with the
10 administration and then obviously the Executive Order
11 was signed, and now we're in a litigation posture.

12 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: So, who would be
13 present for that conversation? Who was present for
14 that conversation?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: Present? I
16 was involved in conversations.

17 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: And who else? Who
18 were the staff members from DOC present in that
19 discussion?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: I think
21 really just myself and the Commissioner, but I don't
22 think together. There was not present [inaudible]--

23 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] Okay.
24 Please, can you confirm that in the follow up?

25 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: Yeah.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

43

2 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: As long as-- as well
3 as the date. One more question about the Federal
4 Monitor and then I'll pass it back to the Chair.
5 Chief District Judge Laura Taylor Swain has ruled
6 that an independent remediation manager will be
7 appointed to work with the Department to develop a
8 phased action plan to create reform within the jails.
9 As you know, we'll have to pay. The city's going to
10 have to pay for the remediation manager. Have you
11 accounted for that in-- or had a conversation with
12 OMB for that in upcoming budgets?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: There have
14 been no conversations regarding that. Obviously, you
15 know, that's also in what will be active litigation--
16 is active litigation, so we can't comment on that.

17 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. Okay, I'll ask
18 other questions after, but turning back over to
19 Chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: thank you, Chair.
21 Okay, we've also been joined by Majority Leader
22 Farías and Council Members Cabán and Abreu. And
23 we're now going to turn to questions, Council Member
24 Louis followed by Narcisse.

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

44

2 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Chairs,
3 and good morning First Deputy Commissioner and your
4 team. Three quick questions. I wanted to know what
5 is the current gender breakdown of the uniform DOC
6 workforce, and how does the Department project that
7 will change in FY26 compared to FY25? In addition to
8 that, a follow-up question to that, what is the FY26
9 budget allocation for-- sorry. The first one is in
10 regards to the breakdown in gender, but the second
11 one is in regards to how will the one-time \$50,000
12 increase in federal funding for the Prison Rape
13 Elimination Program be distributed across services
14 such as education, facility audits, and survivor
15 support? And my last question is in regards to
16 borough-based jails. I wanted to know what
17 investments are being made to ensure that the
18 facility meets the demands for more humane
19 environment, including mental health services, family
20 visitation and re-entry programming in alignment with
21 community feedback?

22 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: Board
23 member, I may have to ask you during the conversation
24 to repeat your question in order for us to ensure
25 that we answer all of your--

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

45

2 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: [interposing] I'll
3 do the first one again.

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES:
5 points. So, I'm going to have Bureau Chief, Chief
6 Rembert give you the specifics of the breakdown on
7 gender by our staff.

8 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay.

9 CHIEF REMBERT: Good morning again. The
10 gender breakdown for males is 3,026. The female
11 breakdown is 2,538. On the male gender breakdown,
12 it's 54.39 percent. On the female it's 45.61
13 percent.

14 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: And how will that
15 change in FY26? You mentioned uniformed offices,
16 they're eligible for-- 716 are eligible for
17 retirement. So how does that look for FY26?

18 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: So,
19 keep in mind that that is very fluid. I wish that we
20 could actually project who will retire. We do have
21 numbers on who is scheduled, but keep in mind that
22 there's some members that decide to stay with us
23 rather than just go that venue. We'll be more than
24 happy to share with you as we see the attrition rate.

25 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Right.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

46

2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: But do
3 know, Board Member Louis, that as a department we are
4 committed to ensuring that we recruit and that we on-
5 board new staff members, significantly new recruits.
6 It is something that we are investing in terms of in-
7 person recruitment by our recruitment unit as well as
8 investments in marketing such as announcement in
9 television, radio, using social media to bring in
10 fresh members, and--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: [interposing] Which
12 could be a bit more enticing, because I've seen them
13 myself, and I'm happy that you all are investing the
14 funds to do that, but it could be more enticing. My
15 last to questions, and I'll just try to reiterate
16 them because my time is up. How will the one-time
17 \$50,000 increase in federal funding for the Prison
18 Rape Elimination Program be distributed across
19 services, education, facility, and survivor support?
20 And the last one is regarding borough-based jails,
21 the investments to make sure that we have everything
22 we need for a humane environment?

23 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES:
24 Assistant Commissioner Zubair will respond to the
25 allocation of the funds, while Commissioner--

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

47

2 Assistant Commissioner Maldonado will talk to you
3 about the BBJs.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thanks.

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ZUBAIR: Thank
6 you, Council Member Louis. The one-time increase in
7 \$50,000 will be used to procure services for a trauma
8 expert who-- and the vendor will train one staff
9 member and develop a train-- the trainer course. It
10 is still preliminary, and we just received the
11 funding so we haven't done anything yet in terms of
12 procuring or finding a vendor.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: It'll be good if
14 you could have conversations with the Chair about
15 this just so that we could make sure whoever this
16 trauma expert is is actually meeting the criteria.
17 Last one's on borough-based jails. I know Council
18 Member Restler's here. He's one of the members of
19 the committee. I know he'll have a lot of questions
20 about that, but just wanted to ask that really
21 quickly. Thank you, Chairs.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. We have
23 questions from Council Member Narcisse followed by
24 Restler.

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

48

2 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Good morning,
3 and thank you, Chairs. What measures are being taken
4 on this budget to ensure that incarcerated
5 individuals, particularly those with mental health
6 needs, have access to adequate mental health services
7 and care? Are there plans to expand access to mental
8 health professionals and crisis intervention teams
9 within our correctional facilities? And second, how
10 does this budget address the recruitment and
11 retention of Correctional Officers, and what is being
12 done to ensure that staff receive the necessary
13 training to handle complex issues like mental health
14 crisis, de-escalation and trauma-informed care?

15 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: Thank
16 you for your question Council Member Narcisse.
17 Deputy Commissioner Saunders will open up with
18 remarks and responses relative to mental health
19 crisis and crisis intervention.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: Thank you.
21 So--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: [interposing]
23 And can you make it short for me, specifically
24 because I have a few others.

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

49

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SUANDERS: Sure. So,
3 as you know, our colleagues at CHS operate the
4 clinical side, and they have different specialized
5 housing areas, one mental observation, CAPs and PACE.
6 So, you have mental health needs being addressed
7 through that vehicle. In addition there's training
8 provided at the Academy and ongoing training in
9 crisis intervention and de-escalation, mental health
10 first aid training, and including CPR and other types
11 of training. I'm keeping it brief.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I think I had a
13 second part. I had a second part, I don't think I
14 hear it. The budget, how does this budget address
15 the equipment and retention of Correction Officers,
16 and what's being done to ensure the staff receiving
17 all the necessary parts you say?

18 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES:

19 [inaudible] Since Commissioner Maginley-Liddie's
20 appointment as Commissioner, we have been committed
21 to ensuring the wellness of our staff. When it comes
22 to recruitment and retention, that is something that
23 we're focusing on. In fact, late last year we
24 developed a retention team consisting of officers and
25 supported by the Deputy Commissioner and Assistant

2 Commissioners from our training academy. Those
3 retention officers are the ones that conduct follow-
4 ups with our newly assigned offices to ensure that
5 they are well supported by any of us or by them as
6 they go through the new challenges that they face in
7 these new positions. But what we have done in
8 addition to that is-- the Office of Mental Health has
9 awarded our department with a grant that we have made
10 great strides in. We have indeed on-boarded new
11 training to support our staff members such as
12 resiliency and peer tutoring and peer support. It is
13 crucial that as we do that we also continue to invest
14 in development or the development of wellness centers
15 throughout our department. We're happy to share with
16 you that earlier this month we opened up four
17 wellness centers. We are in total now have six
18 wellness centers that allowed our staff members to
19 actually be able to go into those areas to assume or
20 have time to process anything that has transpired.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: I don't have
22 much time, but I want to know how many actually using
23 the wellness. I was going to have some question
24 about wellness.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

51

2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: Ill be
3 more than happy to do a follow-up and share with you
4 that specific.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: And one more
6 thing, do you have enough staff to escort PICs to
7 medical appointments? Because last time we were
8 here, we're talking about budget. Do you have
9 budget, and are we-- do we have enough?

10 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES:
11 Production of medical appointments, or PICs to
12 medical appointments continue to be paramount to us,
13 and so it is prioritized on a daily basis.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER NARCISSE: Since my time
15 is short, so I want to say thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We've been joined
18 by Council Member Stevens. Now we have questions
19 from Council Member Restler.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you very
21 much. Thank you to the Chairs and to the Department
22 of Corrections for joining us today. I wanted to
23 first ask about the therapeutic beds. So, we've 104
24 beds completed at Bellevue. The work is all done,
25 ready, waiting, mothballed because the Department of

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

52

2 Corrections refuses to staff the facility. When will
3 the Department of Corrections be opening this
4 facility? Date, please.

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: Good
6 morning, sir. We don't have a date right now. We're
7 still working towards state commissioning with the
8 State Commission of Correction.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: You're waiting
10 on SCOC approval?

11 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: We are
12 working with the State to gain approval so that we
13 can commission this as a jail facility.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: So, we've-- the
15 work has been completed for many months. We've been
16 waiting and waiting, years delayed, to get this open.
17 Correctional Health Services is pointing the finger
18 squarely at you all. Why has this not gotten done?

19 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO:
20 There's been some, I think, misunderstanding and
21 miscommunication about this issue. We reached
22 substantial completion resulting in the temporary
23 certificate of occupancy. However, the SCOC, State
24 Commission of Correction, requires final completion

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

53

2 in order for individuals in custody to be housed
3 safely in this facility.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: You know, why you
5 haven't gone through that process and secured the
6 necessary approvals for a facility that's been
7 completed, that's years behind schedule-- Mayor Adams
8 has the hutzpah to talk about wanting to, you know,
9 change the borough-based jail plan and convert a jail
10 into a mental health facility or a healthcare
11 facility. We have 104 empty beds that are ready to
12 be open, but the Department of Corrections won't do
13 its job. You have no date, no timeline, none-- right?
14 I mean, like, you continue to have literally just no
15 information whatsoever for when this site is going to
16 come online.

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: The
18 facility is not yet ready to occupy and it's not safe
19 for individuals in custody.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: And you're not
21 prepared to give any frame of time for when it's
22 going to open.

23 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: As
24 soon as we have a date, we will provide it to you.

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay. Years of
3 delay and obstinance and obstruction from the
4 Department of Corrections, and we're still at a point
5 where there is no timeline for when you're moving
6 forward. Let's shift to the other two new
7 therapeutic bed facilities that are supposed to also
8 open that the Department of Corrections has been
9 wholly uncooperative in moving forward, Woodhall and
10 North Central Bronx. When are these sites going to
11 open?

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: Sir,
13 the Department has been fully cooperative in working
14 with CHS and our partners at H+H. In order--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: [interposing]
16 Only people who describe you as cooperative are
17 yourselves.

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: In
19 order to review and approve the design documents for
20 those facilities--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: [interposing]
22 We're years behind schedule. Early-- last year, we
23 got the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services
24 when we had people working over there to approve this
25 project. Deputy Mayor Williams-Isom got a green

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

55

2 light to move these sites forward again after they
3 had been stalled, and we've heard no final design has
4 been approved.

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: We are
6 working to approve those designs, sir. We're
7 working--

8 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: [interposing]
9 We're months and years delayed, right? Years and
10 years delay. You could be moving the people out of
11 Department of Corrections who have the most severe
12 health needs, but you're not doing any of the work to
13 actually make it happen. In fact, you're obstructing
14 every step of the way, and you're saying you're
15 moving forward and you're working cooperatively with
16 no timelines, no accountability, and no actual
17 milestones to demonstrate progress.

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: I
19 think my staff who work tirelessly-- it's on both the
20 borough-based jail program and the OTHU program--
21 would argue that they are dedicated to this program
22 and to the OTHU program as well.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: If you don't
24 come before us with a timeline for when you're going
25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

56

2 to actually get anything accomplished, then there's
3 no accountability.

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: Sir,
5 we can't account for the SCOC and the timeline that
6 it takes. We are working towards those milestones.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Any other agency
8 that comes before us with capital funding for a
9 project that's been in the budget for five years,
10 this capital funding, would say these are the dates
11 and the times that we're going to have design
12 completed, we're going to have procurement completed,
13 we're going to have construction completed. The
14 Department of Corrections, though, just operates in
15 fantasy land and just does whatever it wants whenever
16 it wants, and I don't understand it. I like don't
17 understand why you should all have the ability to
18 come before us and give no information, no timeline,
19 no accountability. It's not how this is supposed to
20 work. Our job is to ask questions and get answers.
21 And yet, every time you come before us, we get
22 nothing. So, this was just one topic. I could have
23 done 10 topics, but the answers would have all been
24 the same, no information, no substance, no

25

2 accountability. That is the hallmark for the
3 Department of Corrections under Eric Adams.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Council
5 Member. I have one or two questions, and I'm going to
6 turn it back to Chair nurse. In the Preliminary Plan,
7 DOC received almost a \$4.5 million increase for
8 nutritional services. Yet, at the Board of
9 Corrections meeting on May 13th of this year, there
10 were multiple complaints about the food including
11 allegations that there were not enough food for
12 everyone and that people were not receiving food per
13 their dietary or religious restrictions. So, what's
14 being done to address those complaints? Turn your
15 mic.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: Deputy
17 Commissioner James Saunders. Thank you for the
18 question. So, I can tell you that we have
19 approximately 7,500 PICs, persons in custody, as of
20 today. The Nutritional Services Division prepares
21 over 20,000 meals daily. Within that number are a
22 number of specialized meals for individuals who
23 declare themselves to be of a certain religion, and
24 we have plenty of specialized meals for individuals
25 who request a kosher meal. We also have specialized

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

58

2 meals for individuals who have therapeutic need. So,
3 if there's a specific complaint, I'd be happy to take
4 it back to the team and address it.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I mean, I guess
6 we're talking about in this meeting on May 13th there
7 were multiple complaints made at the Board of
8 Correction meeting, including allegations that there
9 was not enough food and that people who have dietary
10 or religious restrictions were not getting that food.
11 You're not aware of that?

12 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: So,
13 Chair Brannan, any complaint that is brought to our
14 attention is immediately addressed by the area that
15 is supposed to be responsible for. Nutritional
16 Services would have been addressed by Deputy
17 Commissioner Saunders and his entire team.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, but he just
19 said he's not aware of the complaint.

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: We're
21 not-- brought to us directly--

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] You're
23 not aware--

24 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES:
25 [interposing] Brought to us directly with a name of a

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

59

2 person that complains in order for us to just not
3 look at the complaint of the person, but how that
4 complaint has impacted that entire area is something
5 that we would have addressed.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, back in
7 March, DOC said they were looking to hire an
8 assistant commissioner to oversee Nutritional
9 Services. Has that position been filled?

10 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: The
11 interview process has been conducted, and the name of
12 the candidate has been submitted for vetting.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Do you have
14 enough staff to escort all the people in custody to
15 medical appointments?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: So,
17 there's no magic number to give you right now to say
18 that there is-- we need 300 individuals to escort. I
19 can tell you that out of the 640 or so thousand
20 scheduled appointments for an average daily
21 population of 6,900 there are a enough staff. The
22 vast majority of nonproduction is due to individuals
23 not wanting to go to their clinic appointment, and
24 less than one percent of clinic nonproduction relates
25 to their not having an escort available. And in the

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

60

2 case where there is no escort available, we work very
3 closely with CHS to have the individual rescheduled
4 for later in the day or for the following day.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Alright, I'm going
6 to turn it back to Chair Nurse. Thanks.

7 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Thanks. I just
8 wanted to follow up on the therapeutic units. Sorry
9 to bring it back up. Can you tell me about the nature
10 of working with the State Commission? Like, when was
11 the last time you all had a meeting together? Or you
12 wait-- like, what's outstanding? Just so that we have
13 a little bit more sense of what you're dealing with.

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: Sure.
15 They visit the site at Bellevue at least once a
16 month, and I believe our last walk-through was
17 approximately two weeks ago, and following those
18 meeting-- and we meet, we discuss the transition, and
19 they also walk the site. Following those meetings,
20 they send a letter to our Commissioner detailing the
21 expectations that they would need to meet
22 commissioning and sort of the progress therein. So,
23 there are some significant construction items that
24 are still outstanding that our team, DC Doherty and
25 his team will have to complete. There are also--

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

61

2 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] Can you
3 tell-- can you elaborate just a little bit more on
4 some of these, the construction items?

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: Sure--

6 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] Just to
7 understand how significant they are.

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: Some
9 of the design fixtures that were in place are
10 behavioral health fixtures, and so we are remedying
11 those to be correctional grade fixtures, because this
12 is a detention-grade facility.

13 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Right.

14 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: And
15 under the State Commission those are required.

16 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: What kind of fixtures
17 are-- just--

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: Exit
19 signs.

20 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay.

21 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: Staff
22 stations, there's glazing on the staff stations--

23 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] Okay.

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: for
25 example. There's also some trim that's utilized

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

62

2 that's metal trim, for example, that we wouldn't put
3 in a detention facility.

4 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay.

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: So
6 those things are being remedied by our team. We also
7 have policies that we've submitted to the SCOC for
8 review and approval. We received feedback recently,
9 so we're in sort of an editing process with them. We
10 also have training. Our training academy is working
11 with our team, and CHS as well in order to develop
12 training, multidisciplinary training for everybody
13 who we assigned to this facility. So that's ongoing.
14 The SCOC will have to approve those. But the biggest
15 obstacle, in true transparency, is our staffing
16 issue. As what has been described here today,
17 staffing is a problem for the Department currently,
18 and this is a staffing-rich model. The efficiencies
19 are not maximized in this particular facility. So,
20 we working again with the state to identify which
21 posts are mandatory in order to provide a safe and
22 secure environment for both staff and people in
23 custody.

24 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. So, one, it
25 would be great to get that out-- if you could provide

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

63

2 in the follow-up that outstanding list, I think that
3 would help members understand why-- you know, what's
4 going on so we don't assume nothing's going on. And
5 then two, in terms of staffing, so you've submitted a
6 staffing plan and the state has rejected it or you
7 haven't developed a staffing plan and you're in
8 process with that? Can you just-- I mean, how many
9 people are you needing? My understanding is CHS will
10 be managing the staffing and budget for that. Am I
11 correct in that?

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: I'm
13 not sure. They will certainly be handling their own
14 staffing and their assignments for the medical
15 services and mental health services. However, the
16 Department will oversee the facility as a whole and
17 manage its own staffing. In terms of budget, those
18 staff members come out of our lines of budget. We
19 do-- we did have a-- we submitted a draft staffing
20 plan to the State Commission of Correction. It was
21 approximately 280 staff members--

22 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] When was
23 that? When did you submit that? Was it in this
24 year?

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

64

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: It was
3 this year.

4 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay.

5 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO:
6 Forgive me, I don't remember the date.

7 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: That's fine.

8 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: At our
9 last-- I believe at our last couple hearings we
10 discussed it was about approximately 280 staff
11 members needed. That's including staff members for
12 all three tours, all the of posts as well as coverage
13 factors, right, for people who are out or what have
14 you. And so those-- that was approximately 280
15 needed to be assigned. The state came back with its
16 post analysis and they described 99 posts that would
17 be needed to manage this facility. However, that
18 does not take into account local regulations as well
19 as that does not take into account some of our
20 collective bargaining agreements. So we are
21 currently in the process of working with the state to
22 figure out what that number really is when you take
23 into account all of these other factors.

24 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: So, the state says
25 you need 99 COs.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

65

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: Posts.

3 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Posts, I'm sorry.

4 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: Posts

5 so that--

6 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] And then
7 you're accounting for, you know, the tours and back-
8 up incase people call out.

9 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: Right,
10 we have to do all of that other work.

11 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay.

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: So,
13 it's still over-- approximately over 200 staff
14 members.

15 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: And those pieces are
16 a part of collective bargaining, or are those
17 separate pieces?

18 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: Some
19 of those pieces are a part of collective bargaining.
20 That requires a certain number of posts per--
21 depending on what the uniform rank is. So, again,
22 we're kind of working through those details and
23 certainly welcome an opportunity to talk offline.

24 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: When do you-- when do
25 you anticipate sending something back to the state?

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

66

2 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: In
3 short order.

4 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Within like a couple
5 months?

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: Oh,
7 certainly within a couple of months. I mean, we're
8 in regular communication with them, and the staffing
9 plan would be required for commissioning.

10 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: And when's their next
11 visit or when's your next scheduled meeting with
12 them?

13 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER MALDONADO: I
14 believe it's next month. They come down for both the
15 Bellevue project as well as the borough-based jail
16 project.

17 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. Council Member
18 Althea, do you want to ask a question?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Hello, good
20 morning. I just have a question. I have a colleague
21 and friend who has a sibling who's in jail, and they
22 have an issue around-- we need to know how many
23 lockdowns and non-movements that's happening in the
24 GRVC building because they had got word that they had
25 been locked down for a number of days and just trying

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

67

2 to see how often these lockdowns are taking place.
3 What are the causes of some of these lockdowns,
4 because we have some serious concerns? And this was
5 like, apparently like a week or two ago.

6 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: To
7 give you a general overview on lockdowns, I'll have
8 Senior Deputy Commissioner Frage.

9 SENIOR DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRAGE: Good
10 morning, ma'am, SD Frage. In reference to the
11 lockdowns of GRVC or any other facility on Rikers
12 Island, those are generally based on acts of violence
13 or naloxone deployments that occur in those
14 facilities. So, as for instance, this weekend there
15 were three acts of violence in one facility, which
16 means we'd have to lock the facility down to make
17 sure all the persons in custody are safe, and before
18 we open back up to search for possible weapons and
19 things of that nature. This week--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing]
21 So, do you have like an average on how often these
22 lockdowns are taking place?

23 SENIOR DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRAGE: I don't
24 have an average in front of me right now, but I can
25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

68

2 provide that to you after this meeting in near
3 future.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: And so, like--
5 so, obviously-- how long does the lockdown typically
6 take place? Because what I'm hearing it was for a
7 couple of weeks, and she doesn't know the building
8 that his-- the unit he's in. She just knows it's
9 JRVC [sic], the building, and she doesn't know what
10 house he's in.

11 SENIOR DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRAGE: There
12 is no couple of weeks of lockdown. It's a day,
13 several days, depending on the circumstance and how
14 many happen in that facility and the time it takes
15 for us to have enough staff to search to make sure
16 that it's rendered safe--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing]
18 How long does it typically take your staff to search
19 if there is an act of violence or something like
20 that?

21 SENIOR DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRAGE: If
22 there's only one act of violence, usually they
23 activate some of the units to go up there
24 instantaneously when it happens. If it's overnight,
25 they're locked down until we can get the personnel.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

69

2 Sometimes the facilities, we ask the security staff
3 to start doing their searches on their own, but it
4 varies. I can't give you specifics on the exact
5 timing on how long each takes, but it's based on the
6 severity of the circumstances and the situation, and
7 it's a fluid situation. If we have a situation where
8 there's, you know, 10 or so people in reference to
9 violence and three or four are going to the hospital,
10 that puts a strain on us to man the facility also.
11 Those are all the procedures that get placed. I can
12 give you more information at a later date, exactly
13 how many we've had the past month and where we
14 rectify them.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Oh, yeah,
16 definitely. If you could follow up offline and
17 definitely give me how many has taken place in the
18 last month, how long-- and the length that they were,
19 and I'll try to get the exact house that we had got
20 these reports from, that they were on lockdown for a
21 number of weeks, and just try to get an understanding
22 of what's happening. Thank you.

23 SENIOR DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRAGE:
24 [inaudible] And like I said, I can give you some
25 information on for instance November 2024, EMTC had

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

70

2 32 all the way to May of 2025. So, for the month of-
3 - from November 2024 to May of 25, EMTC had 32 lock-
4 in situations. GRVC facility from the month of
5 November 2024 to May 2025 they had 75. So,--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: [interposing]
7 They had 75.

8 SENIOR DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRAGE:
9 [inaudible] that day. So, you're specifically
10 interested with the GRVC, so those are the numbers
11 for the GRVC.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: I'm sorry, say
13 that again. I'm sorry.

14 SENIOR DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRAGE: Those
15 are the numbers for GRVC, it's 75.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: It's 75. They
17 had 75 lockdowns between November and--

18 SENIOR DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRAGE:
19 [interposing] Til May.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Until May.

21 SENIOR DEPUTY COMMISSIONER FRAGE: I
22 can't tell you the length, but those are exact
23 numbers for those instances.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Okay.

25

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BOYD: And just in
3 general, Council Member, the last go-to really is to
4 lock down a house. It really does depend on the
5 situation. We have tried to [inaudible] not to lock
6 down an entire facility. We prefer if it's a
7 specific concentrated situation in the housing area
8 to just open up the entire facility and just keep
9 that specific housing area on lockdown. So, it
10 really is a case by case basis. But yes, if you
11 could certainly get us the housing area, that would
12 be super helpful for us to give you that feedback.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: No, listen, I
14 understand that there's a line that we have to make
15 sure that we're keeping everyone safe, but from what
16 we were hearing that there was a number of weeks
17 where they were locked down and folks couldn't get in
18 touch with them, and it was causing a lot of issues.
19 And so I'll definitely follow up offline to get you
20 the exact house, because I think she's working on
21 that now, but 75 is a lot. So, thinking about what
22 are we doing to mitigate the violence so that we can
23 have less violent outbreaks and things like that, and
24 so I think all of those things need to be considered.
25 Because if there was 75 between November and May, is

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

72

2 locking down, is that working? Because you know, for
3 me, it's always thinking about are there other
4 solutions and what are other ways to think about.
5 But I will get that information and I'll follow up.
6 Thank you.

7 CHIEF REMBERT: Councilwoman Stevens, the
8 lock-ins, there's a process. So, you could do a one-
9 hour lock-in if there-- you suspect an incident
10 that's going to occur. Then we have a housing area
11 lock-in, a facility lock-in, and also we could have a
12 partial lock-in where to the persons in custody must
13 lock in for their own safety concern until we can
14 bring them out. So, when we talk about lock-in,
15 emergency lock-in, there's-- there are steps and
16 levels to it. It's not just we lock it in. It
17 depends on what it is. Now when SDC Frage spoke
18 about 75 for GRVC, we have to determine was it a
19 housing area locked in? Was it a departmental lock-
20 in? Was it a facility lock-in, or was it a partial
21 lock-in, and was it just an hour lock-in with the
22 Assistant Deputy Warden can lock-in.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: No, they were--
24 they were saying specifically it was a lockdown and
25 nonmovement, and this was going on for several weeks.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

73

2 So, that's the bulk of the information I have. So, I
3 know obviously there are going to be different
4 circumstances and things like that. And so I just--
5 you know, like I said it's more assign like what's
6 the process and obviously it's different
7 circumstances.

8 CHIEF REMBERT: Different levels, yes,
9 ma'am. Different levels, different stages. So, you
10 definitely give us that information, we'll check and
11 get back with you.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER STEVENS: Yeah, and also,
13 again, like just thinking about like what are-- and I
14 know that tools are limited. I don't want to pretend
15 like we don't have limited tools. But thinking about
16 are there are other things that we could be doing,
17 too. So, but I will follow up with you guys offline
18 just to get you some more information, because we
19 were trying to come to the facility, but our
20 schedules didn't align. But there was quite some--
21 there was some concerns, because we couldn't get in
22 touch with her brother for quite some time. So,
23 thank you.

24 CHIEF REMBERT: Yes, ma'am.

25

2 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. Thank you,
3 Council Member. I wanted to touch on the Cisco
4 Virtual Visitation platform. Wanted to know will
5 this platform be available on the personal tablets?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BOYD: Something we
7 can certainly explore. We're still working with the
8 vendor and we're currently in the procurement
9 process, but we do know that Cisco application would
10 help kind of streamline the current virtual visit
11 platform and kind of reduce our reliance on Microsoft
12 Teams for both family visits, virtual visits, as well
13 as attorney virtual visits.

14 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: If not on personal
15 tablets, how are you all envisioning the set up to
16 be?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BOYD: First, tapping
18 into our existing kind of apparatuses and platforms
19 throughout the facilities, and then kind of exploring
20 if we need to either expand it in other places so
21 people can have access. We'll obviously have a
22 conversation about tablets, as well as scheduling-- a
23 scheduling platform for scheduling in-person visits
24 which I think recently passed.

2 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. And the
3 Lightning Law discovery sharing platform-- can you
4 just for the record-- I don't think we've talked
5 about it here at this hearing or in this committee
6 before. Maybe we did. I'm sorry. But can you just
7 for the record explain how the platform will work?

8 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: We're
9 going to have our Deputy General Counsel--

10 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] General
11 Counsel.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: So, I'm not
13 incredibly versed on the technical aspects of it, but
14 essentially what it does, it allows an attorney to
15 share all types of discovery directly with the
16 client. So, it would encompass records. I believe
17 video is part of that as well, so any body-worn
18 camera type things. It's something that is direct
19 from the attorney to the client. They can review the
20 discovery. I think there's an element of a
21 communication, but kind of a messaging back and
22 forth, but we envision it and as do the Defense Bar
23 to be something that really helps to facilitate an
24 advanced review of the discovery before they meet
25 with them, because what ends up happening, because if

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

76

2 we have to do it all at one time it becomes
3 protracted visits, and I think they want to
4 accelerate this so that when they have the
5 appearances it's kind of taken care of before the
6 court appearance.

7 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: And so, this will be
8 kind of set up similar to the visitation area.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: No,
10 actually, I think this is going to be on the tablets.

11 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: On the--

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY:
13 [interposing] Yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Oh, this is on the
15 tablet, okay.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: Yes, the
17 Lightning Law will be on the tablets--

18 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] Okay,
19 great.

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: and kiosks
21 in the Law Library. The virtual visits is going to
22 be for now in kiosks.

23 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Got it. Okay. In
24 terms of the opioid stimulant and substance program,
25 you've-- you've got money for hiring five addiction

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

77

2 counselors to provide persons in custody with
3 individual plans, counseling, connection to
4 community-based organizations. When do you all
5 anticipate filling these positions? [inaudible]

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MCCARTY: Hello, Nell
7 McCarty again. So, we have interviewed for the five
8 positions. We have actually submitted for them as
9 well. So, we are considering them in the pipeline.
10 We're waiting for them to get their final vetting to
11 be able to on-board them.

12 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay, great.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MCCARTY: We are also
14 posting for a supervisor, so that should be going up
15 shortly.

16 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. And we see
17 that the funding stops after Fiscal Year 27. Is
18 there any reason for that that you're aware of?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MCCARTY: That was
20 the length of the grant. So this is a grant-funded
21 position, and so the length of the grant is for those
22 few years, and we hope to be able to bring those
23 folks on full-time with their own lines.

24 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. I wanted to ask
25 a question. Well, while you're up here, we have just

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

78

2 one more programming question. You have 34 vacancies
3 in the Division of Programming which you credited for
4 the lack of staff to-- your inability to meet the
5 mandatory five hours. How many of those positions
6 have been filled, and how many are still vacant? I
7 think you answered this earlier, but just--

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MCCARTY: Yeah, so
9 when we last spoke and we came up with-- or we spoke
10 about that number, we reduced that number down to 12
11 vacancies with the addition of a few actually new
12 needs that came in. We currently have 20 vacancies,
13 but those weren't accounted for when we speaking at
14 the Preliminary Budget hearing. So, I just want to
15 flag that, and those actually include like the five
16 lines for the substance misuse counselors that we're
17 trying to bring in in the pipeline. So right now,
18 it's 20 that we have as true vacancies.

19 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. Transitioning
20 to cell doors. The Preliminary Plan included a
21 baseline \$2.5 million increase for cell doors. Just a
22 question on how many doors have been replaced so far
23 using these funds?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DOHERTY: Morning.
25 Thank you for the question. Kevin Doherty, Deputy

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

79

2 Commissioner of Facility Maintenance Repair Division.

3 For Fiscal Year 25, are you speaking for the \$2.5

4 allocated for Fiscal Year 25, or?

5 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Let me see how it's

6 written here. It's not-- yeah, look, it just says

7 how much did you spend in FY25 on doors, actually?

8 Let me start there.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DOHERTY: So, for

10 Fiscal Year 25, not accounting for the \$2.5 that was

11 allocated as of March--

12 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] Yes.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DOHERTY: We have

14 installed 177 doors.

15 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. Do you

16 purchase doors from the same provider every time?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DOHERTY: We

18 allocate-- we go through our JOCS [sic] contractor,

19 and we provide specific, very specific, requirements

20 for the doors. For the doors that we have allocated

21 currently, they all-- they do come from one specific

22 vendor.

23 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: One specific vendor,

24 right. I'm sure there's not, like, that many jail

25 door builders out there.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

80

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DOHERTY: Correct.

3 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. So, the
4 funding specifically to purchase new doors that's put
5 in the plan, is that to cover the cost for new parts
6 or whole new doors, or does it also cover personnel
7 costs associated with that?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DOHERTY: So, for the
9 \$2.5 million that was baselined from Fiscal Year 25
10 to 29, that is for the full and complete installation
11 of doors.

12 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DOHERTY: So, that
14 comes with door frames, door itself, locking
15 mechanisms, door hinges, removal costs, installation
16 costs, as well as manpower costs.

17 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: And is the-- who does
18 the labor for that?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DOHERTY: Contractor.

20 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Outside, okay. Is it
21 generally the same contractor every time?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DOHERTY: So, for the
23 177 doors prior to the \$2.5 allocated this year, that
24 was done by in-house trades.

25 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

81

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DOHERTY: And we
3 specifically did it in areas of the higher
4 classification.

5 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. So, previously
6 the doors were done by in-house trades. Moving
7 forward it will be outsourced through contractors.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER DOHERTY: Correct.

9 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. Okay. I'm
10 going to transition to a conversation about the state
11 prison facilities. Well, the closure of three
12 additional state prison facilities, and wondering
13 what have been the nature of the conversations
14 between you all and state corrections on how to get
15 folks who are sentenced and waiting to move upstate
16 off of Rikers?

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: So,
18 thank you very much for that question. Our
19 conversations with the state are ongoing. Our
20 commissioner continues to have those conversations on
21 a weekly basis. Our Custody Management Unit also has
22 those conversations on a daily basis. The challenge
23 for the state right now is that as it opened its
24 intake, it's not just taking persons from our own
25 jurisdiction, but rather the entire state. And so

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

82

2 the conversations are ongoing. It's not a secret
3 that we are and have been managing a bed capacity
4 challenge. Our staff and our members of very
5 specific divisions and units have really done an
6 incredible job in basically ensuring that we have all
7 the necessary cells, all the necessary housing areas,
8 that we have a bed for every person that remains in
9 our care, as well as those that are coming in. but
10 the conversations, Chair, are ongoing.

11 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Ongoing, I imagine.
12 Has the state provided a date in which-- any date or
13 any timeline in which they'll resume upstate
14 transfers?

15 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: So,
16 they have already opened up as of May 5th. The
17 numbers that they're taking for us are not ideal,
18 because they need to basically take from every
19 county. I think that we-- they have taken so far
20 approximately 87 persons that are state-ready, but
21 the number and the challenge that we have is that
22 those who are deemed state-ready right now are a
23 large number for us.

24 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: What's the number?

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

83

2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: It
3 exceeds 900. As of today, it's 912 state-ready.

4 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. Okay. For
5 people who are nearing their parole eligibility date,
6 have you discussed the possibility of facilitating
7 Parole Board hearings at Rikers?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: I've had
9 conversations with DOCs and their counsel. Well, not
10 directly with their counsel-- assistant commissioners
11 about that. I mean, I think we really have to look at
12 exactly what you're talking about and I've mentioned
13 this. You know, because as we go along, people are
14 credited with the time that they were in our custody
15 to begin with, so I think there's a circumstance
16 where they're approaching a lot of those, you know,
17 those end-of-sentence or parole-eligible type dates.
18 They've committed to do that again, unfortunately
19 because of what the First Deputy Commissioner said,
20 that they're doing it statewide. You know, they
21 haven't been able to dedicate anyone to us directly
22 yet, but that's our hope, because I think it's a
23 really important thing that they need to look at.

24 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. Just a couple
25 more questions. And actually, General Counsel, I'll

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

84

2 stick with you. With regards to the DOI deadlocking
3 investigation, are there any updates that you can
4 share?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: No, that's
6 ongoing, and as a matter of fact, we just had a
7 communication with them this morning where we're
8 facilitating some transfers, discovery for that.

9 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. I believe we
10 heard that there was an internal memo that was
11 distributed to staff about deadlocking to discourage
12 this practice. That's correct. That happened?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: That's
14 right. It was back when this first was raised at the
15 Board of Correction meeting. We did circulate it at
16 that time.

17 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Is it possible for
18 you to share that with the Council--

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: [interposing]
20 Sure.

21 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: in follow-up?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: Yeah, we can
23 follow up with that, yeah.

24 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. And one other
25 question similarly. Under the investigation--

2 investigations around Charisma Jones [sp?], they
3 found that she was repeatedly denied medical care,
4 even after being transferred to the infirmary with
5 staff claiming that she was on med-lock, and officers
6 stopped medical staff from entering her cell multiple
7 times to check her vitals. As you know, she was
8 later rushed to the hospital, pronounced dead from
9 multi-organ failure. Can you clarify what being on
10 med-lock means? And under what condition someone
11 would be put on med-lock?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: So, med-lock
13 is-- it's not something that we find in our
14 operational directives. It's more something that's a
15 colloquial term. It's medical lock-in. So, in that
16 facility, particular Rose M. Singer, there is no
17 communicable disease unit. So, that is what would be
18 used at that time. It's just something where there
19 is a condition where they can't be otherwise in the
20 dorm areas or, you know, in other facilities, that
21 they're sent there. It's also sometimes used in
22 circumstances when a person newly in intake has not
23 been medically cleared, so where they won't consent
24 to search procedures or otherwise. So, that's what
25 that area is specifically.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

86

2 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: So, who makes those
3 determinations in a facility?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: It's done
5 by-- in certain circumstances CHS would make that
6 determination, and in others it's, again, on the
7 security front when they've not been cleared. I
8 think it's done by our intake.

9 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: And that's
10 communicated outward to warden on the floor, your
11 deputy wardens on the floor? Like, how does that
12 trickle down for someone to know that this young
13 woman was on the colloquial-termed med-lock?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: I think it
15 specifically has-- yes, I think it has to go to
16 [inaudible] leadership. Though, again, I don't know
17 the exact processes and the dissemination of
18 information, but the wardens in those facilities
19 would know who's supposed to be assigned to those
20 areas.

21 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: would you mind
22 providing the protocol for that so we can understand
23 how that is determined, under what conditions, and
24 how that gets-- how it's supposed to be communicated
25 out.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

87

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: Yeah, as I
3 mentioned, that's a colloquial term that's kind of
4 use for that, but we'll get--

5 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] I know
6 that, but if someone is being put aside for some kind
7 of quarantine or something, or medical staff are
8 beign denied to go check up on someone, there must be
9 a-- I imagine there's a protocol with that, and if
10 not, we have a serious problem. So, if there is one,
11 we'd like to have it.

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER CONROY: We certainly
13 will.

14 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Thank you. I believe
15 those are all-- oh, final question. How many people
16 have been released via 6A year-to-date in 2025?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MCCARTY: Hello. So,
18 for 6A year-to-date is 34 people. So, this is
19 January to date.

20 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: 3-4, as in 34?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MCCARTY: 34.

22 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay, 34 people. And
23 how many people are working-- reviewing and working
24 on those types of cases?

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

88

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MCCARTY: Yes, thank
3 you for that question. So, we have an assistant
4 commissioner assigned to our reintegration unit.
5 Underneath that assistant commissioner is an
6 executive director of reintegration as well as a
7 director of reintegration. Last year, for example,
8 at this time, we had one person part-time reviewing
9 individuals for 6A. At this time, we have three
10 people reviewing individuals or candidates for 6A.

11 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Three people. So,
12 three people assigned to just review cases. Is that
13 what they do fully?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MCCARTY: They have
15 other responsibilities, but this is part of their
16 responsibility.

17 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: So, three people,
18 okay. Okay. Those are my questions. I'll turn it
19 back over to Chair Brannan.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Thank you
21 all very much for your testimony, and we look forward
22 to working with you going forward. Thank you.

23 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: Thank
24 you.

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

89

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We're going to take
3 a--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: [interposing] I'm
5 sorry, Chairs, this is Council Member Cabán. I'm so
6 sorry. I passed along a couple of questions to the
7 Chairs. I don't know if it's possible to ask them on
8 my behalf.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Oh, we just-- yeah,
10 we just got--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: [inaudible]

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yep, yep, we just
13 got them now. We'll ask.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CABÁN: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Sorry, just got it.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We don't have
17 quorum, so Council Member Cabán can't ask her
18 questions, but we're going to ask them for her.

19 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: It's related to the
20 6A program, actually. In March, you testified that
21 498 people serving city sentences were eligible for
22 early release through 6A program. In this month's
23 Board of Correction meeting your staff called the
24 current situation in the jails with the sharp rise in
25 the jail population unprecedented, and Board members

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

90

2 urge you to respond to this crisis by using 6A as
3 widely as the Department did in March 2020 when over
4 300 people were released in one month. Have you
5 considered applying the same criteria that was
6 applied in March 2020 to expand 6A releases now?

7 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER TORRES: Chair
8 Nurse, if I may clarify. The number that was quoted
9 earlier, is the number of sentenced individuals that
10 were assigned to our custody. Only sentenced
11 individuals can be considered for 6A. When we talk
12 about 6A, we talk about doing an internal analysis of
13 the entire history of that sentenced individual that
14 could be potentially considered. There are very
15 specific criteria of charges that will not allow that
16 person to be considered for 6A, but just because we
17 have X amount of sentenced doesn't mean that all of
18 those sentenced individuals can be released into 6A.
19 And so the team member that Deputy Commissioner
20 McCarty has described to you, it is their
21 responsibility to actually look at every single
22 sentenced individual to determine if they are
23 eligible for the 6A program.

24 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: What's the-- I mean,
25 well, what you've testified is that you don't

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

91

2 actually have full-time, like a full-time staff just
3 dedicated to reviewing cases. You have three people
4 who have other responsibilities, but also work on
5 this. So, I think that's an issue given the
6 potential eligibility of 498 people. And I guess I'm
7 wondering what's the average length that a review
8 process is?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MCCARTY: That's a
10 great question. So, and just to also highlight, we
11 are looking at making a full-time staff person that
12 literally this is their sole responsibility, but
13 right now we've just divided it between three people.
14 But the average length really varies. And so based
15 on what the initial review might take for one person,
16 you know, a day or a few days for that initial--
17 let's check on their charges. Let's see if they
18 have, you know, any open cases, things that might be
19 easier to screen through, but then it can take up to
20 two weeks for us to go and review their full folder
21 which is paper-based, like, reviewing of any
22 additional forms, anything that could be literally a
23 judge's order for them not to be considered for early
24 release, or rather not even early release, for a
25 program such as 6A.

2 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: And what would you
3 say the percentage of time per each of those three
4 staff people is spent on case review?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER MCCARTY: I mean, I
6 can verify for one of them it's multiple hours of
7 their day.

8 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Okay. So, I think
9 the point-- a point the Council Member would like to
10 make if she was able to speak for herself-- in March
11 2020 there was about 300 people released. Only nine
12 were rearrested for any charge. Less than one
13 percent, which is only two people, were rearrested
14 for a violent felony. And so this is clearly a
15 program and a pathway that would work, and I think
16 it'd be really great to get that full staff member on
17 in any other capacity that would be needed given the
18 situation with upstate inability to transfer, the
19 mental health blockage upstate as well, and then what
20 we have the over-- you know, the census population
21 growing.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER BOYD: So, Council
23 Member, just to add, we're happy to look into
24 possibly expanding what the team looks like that
25 review these 6A applications. But also, just to put

2 it on the record, like March 2020 looks very
3 different than May 2025 and so did our population.
4 So to the FDC's point, the people who are sentenced
5 now, the makeup of their offenses look very different
6 than the people who were in our population in March
7 of 2020. And just to underscore, like, March 2020
8 that was COVID, right? So, people were released, and
9 most of them probably sheltered in place, right? And
10 these were people who had lower offenses, but we are
11 definitely-- and we've had conversation and committed
12 to looking into possibly figuring out how we can
13 expand the unit to create a more systematic review of
14 those applications. But I know it's something that's
15 definitely been a priority for the FDC and DC McCarty
16 as well as the Commissioner.

17 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Yeah, it'd be great
18 if you could provide that statistical data to back up
19 what you're saying in terms of what the top charge of
20 folks were that were released, because what we're
21 seeing is, you know, only two people rearrested, and
22 I'm not even clear if there was a conviction on any
23 violent top charge. Okay. That was it. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Great. Thank you
25 all very much. Alright, so we're going to take a

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

94

2 break. We will reconvene at around noon, and we'll
3 hear from the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

4 [break]

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Just an update guys.
6 Remember, food or beverages need to be taken out to
7 the rotunda. You got to put it in your bag or you
8 got to finish it in the rotunda. Again, no one
9 approach the dais at any time. Please. Thank you.

10 UNIDENTIFIED: [speaking Spanish]

11 UNIDENTIFIED: [speaking non-English]

12 UNIDENTIFIED: [speaking non-English]

13 UNIDENTIFIED: [speaking non-English]

14 UNIDENTIFIED: [speaking non-English]

15 UNIDENTIFIED: [speaking non-English]

16 UNIDENTIFIED: [speaking non-English]

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: We are ready to begin.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you,

19 Sergeant. Good afternoon and welcome to the second
20 portion of today's Executive Budget hearings. We're
21 going to hear today this afternoon from the
22 Commissioner Castro and the Mayor's Office of
23 Immigrant Affairs. I'm Council Member Brannan, I
24 chair the Committee on Finance, and I'm pleased to be
25 joined by my friend and colleague, Council Member

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

95

2 Alexa Avilés who chairs the Committee on Immigration.
3 We've been joined this afternoon by Council Member
4 Salaam, Louis, Hanif, and Moya. Welcome Commissioner
5 Castro and your team. Thank you for joining us today
6 to answer our questions. On May 1st, 2025, the
7 administration released the Executive Financial Plan
8 for FY26 to 29 with a proposed FY26 budget of \$115.1
9 billion. MOIA's projected FY26 budget of \$781,962
10 represents less than one percent of the
11 administration's proposed budget in the Executive
12 Plan, and it remains unchanged from the amount
13 budgeted for MOIA in the administration's Preliminary
14 Plan back in January. My questions today will
15 largely focus on MOIA's properties as well as
16 capacity, legal support services, and language access
17 for various city agencies, but I now want to turn to
18 my co-chair for this hearing, Council Member Avilés
19 for her opening statement.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much,
21 Chair. Good afternoon. I'm Council Member Alexa
22 Avilés, Chair of the Committee on Immigration. Thank
23 you all for joining us at this Fiscal 2026 Executive
24 Budget hearing for the Mayor's Office Immigrant
25 Affairs, otherwise known as MOIA. I would like to

2 thank my fellow Council Member, Chair Brannan, for
3 joining me at this joint hearing, and also would like
4 to thank Commissioner Castro and other members of the
5 administration who are with us today. I want to take
6 a moment to acknowledge the precious and ongoing
7 contributions that immigrant New Yorkers make to our
8 city every single day, culturally and economically.
9 Immigrants are the heartbeat of our neighborhoods and
10 a vital part of the fabric of not only New York City,
11 but the country as a whole, and yet daily we've seen
12 our Federal Government threaten the safety and
13 vitality of our immigrant New Yorkers. just this
14 weekend, a high school student in the Bronx was
15 detained after showing up to what he thought was a
16 routine court date, and ever since has been prevented
17 from receiving desperate medical care or service from
18 his legal counsel. Stories like this will only become
19 more common in our city under this Trump
20 administration, particularly if we are not funding
21 the organizations that provide the direct services
22 and/or education to immigrant communities. I would
23 also like to recognize that the work the City has
24 undertaken to support immigrants' health,
25 particularly in expanding access to care through

2 initiatives like New York City Care and providing
3 emergency health services along with disease
4 prevention care to those who most cannot-- who cannot
5 afford it, regardless of their immigration status.

6 These are critical steps to ensure that our new
7 neighbors remain healthy, and we commend the city
8 agencies and community partners working tirelessly to
9 meet the needs of our diverse communities. Our city
10 government is the last line of defense in providing
11 crucial services to our most vulnerable communities.

12 That being said, we must also be honest about the
13 gaps that remain and how the proposed Fiscal 2026
14 Executive Budget misses the mark of further
15 supporting the enormous work that community-based
16 organizations are doing on the ground, prioritizing
17 and adequately funding legal services. Again,
18 adequately funding legal services and language access
19 should not be negotiable. These are essential
20 components to a just and equitable city. And when
21 these supports fall short, it impacts the lives and
22 livelihoods, leaving our new neighbors and old
23 neighbors vulnerable at every moment they need for
24 stability and protection. Further, compounding this
25 challenge is the federal house approved budget

2 reconciliation bill which proposes new penalties for
3 state's that offer healthcare to undocumented
4 immigrants. This is deeply troubling development that
5 threatens New York's ability to continue using state
6 funds to support essential care. It risks widening
7 existing disparities and could undermine our
8 longstanding commitment to being a city that welcomes
9 and cares for all. We cannot claim to be a sanctuary
10 city while simultaneously scaling back the very
11 support that makes that vision real. This
12 administration has had both the time and the
13 resources to build a comprehensive and compassionate
14 response. Unfortunately, we've seen much of reactive
15 decisions, under-investment, and very much missed
16 opportunities. New York City has long been a safe
17 haven for immigrant communities, including the
18 growing number of unaccompanied minors who arrive
19 here seeking safety and stability. This young
20 population faces tremendous challenges navigating
21 immigration court alone, and the Executive Budget
22 lacks any dedicated funding to address this unique
23 need. Cancelled contracts also has meant loss of
24 hundreds of jobs in New York City, as well. This
25 administration and the Council has a responsibility

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

99

2 to ensure that our city budget reflects our values
3 and acknowledges the truth of this time. And yet,
4 throughout the budget exercise we see administration
5 acting like nothing is quite happening in the broader
6 context, and it would much rather waste taxpayer
7 dollars in advancing Trump's agenda than harnessing
8 everything in our city's power to protect immigrants.
9 It is unconscionable, highly-alarming, and profoundly
10 harmful to immigrant communities. Before we hear
11 from MOIA, I would like to thank committee staff,
12 Catalina Gill [sp?], Florentine Cabor [sp?], Nicole
13 Gatta [sp?], Rebecca Barilla [sp?], as well as my
14 dedicated staff, Edward Cerna [sp?] and Christina
15 Botego [sp?], for their unwavering commitment and
16 hard work. With that, thank you, Chair.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you, Chair.
18 Going to turn it over to the Committee Counsel Brian
19 Sarfo to swear you in, and we can begin.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Good afternoon. do
21 you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and
22 nothing but the truth before the committee and to
23 respond honestly to Council Member questions?
24 Commissioner Castro? Deputy Commissioner Sanchez?

25 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: I do.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

100

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Deputy Commissioner
3 Lucero?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I do.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin.

6 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you, Chair
7 Avilés and Chair Brannan and the Committee on
8 Immigration and the Committee on Finance for holding
9 this budget hearing. My name is Manuel Castro and I
10 serve as the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office
11 Immigrant Affairs. I'm joined today by Jasniya
12 Sanchez, Deputy Commissioner of Administration and
13 Strategic Initiatives and Lorena Lucero, Deputy
14 Commissioner of Programs and Policy. In my
15 testimony, I will discuss the Fiscal Year 2026 budget
16 and our priorities. But before I begin, I want to
17 speak directly to New York City's immigrant
18 communities. [speaking Spanish] Now in English. I
19 know this is a difficult time. I know many are
20 feeling fear, fear of being separated from their
21 loved ones, fear of having to leave their place, the
22 place that they have now called their home, or even
23 fear simply being seen. I felt that fear. I crossed
24 the border when I was just five years old and grew up
25 undocumented in this very city. I know that it--

2 what it's like to try to build a life while carrying
3 uncertainty every single day. So, I want to take
4 this moment to say this to you clearly and directly,
5 our immigrant communities, as you've heard from the
6 Mayor and from our city's leadership, keep accessing
7 all city services without fear. As you've heard
8 directly from the school's chancellor, continue to
9 send your children to school. From the Police
10 Commissioner, if you witness or experience a crime,
11 call 911. From the President of our Health +
12 Hospitals system and the Commissioner of Department
13 of Health and Mental Hygiene, seek care at our public
14 hospitals and city administered health programs when
15 you need them. And I can go on and on, because this
16 city has people, public servants, educators,
17 healthcare workers, your neighbors who care deeply
18 about your safety and your future. These are not
19 only city services, they are your rights, and they
20 are here for you. But most importantly, don't lose
21 faith. Don't lose hope. Continue to live your life
22 and don't let fear win. Now, let me begin with a
23 brief overview of where we stand. I'm glad to share
24 that all of MOIA's funding is preserved in the
25 Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2026, and we are

2 entering the new fiscal year with a proposed budget
3 of approximately \$29.6 million, the largest budget
4 since the office was created. This budget allows to
5 continue strengthening MOIA's programs and
6 infrastructure across key pillars: immigration legal
7 and support services, English language learning,
8 language access, community engagement, and
9 communications to our immigrant communities. We will
10 build on three and a half years of sustained mission-
11 driven work during which MOIA has delivered more
12 services than any other time in the office history,
13 while responding to multiple crises impacting
14 immigrant communities. During this time we've
15 significantly expanded access to immigration legal
16 and support services, English classes, language
17 support and more. We've also managed a record number
18 of contracts with immigrant serving nonprofits,
19 ensuing our efforts remain deeply rooted in the
20 community. MOIA aims to use its funding in the most
21 strategic way to meet the emerging needs of immigrant
22 communities. On immigration legal services, in
23 Fiscal Year 26 we are working to A, establish our new
24 MOIA Immigration Legal Support Centers, and B, extend
25 contracts to existing legal providers. We are on

2 track to launching the MOIA Immigration Legal Support
3 Centers initiative for Fiscal Year 26 by July 1st.
4 this initiative is a \$6.4 million annually funded
5 program that will support 25 immigrant-serving
6 nonprofit contractors to provide culturally and
7 linguistic responsive immigration legal services in
8 immigrant-dense neighborhoods. In addition, we are
9 extending existing contracts with immigration legal
10 service providers through Fiscal Year 26 and
11 incorporating them into our MOIA centers model. This
12 new model represents an evolution of Action NYC in
13 past approaches. It incorporates changes that meet
14 the current and emergent needs of New York City's
15 Immigrant communities and places services directly in
16 immigrant neighborhoods. We will also continue to
17 operate the MOIA Immigration Legal Hotline in
18 partnership with Catholic Charities. In 2024 alone,
19 the hotline received over 64,000 calls, connecting
20 immigrant New Yorkers to consultations and trusted
21 referrals amongst our providers. Another cornerstone
22 of our work is English language instruction. Our
23 MOIA English learning program run in partnership with
24 New York City's three public library systems,
25 currently offers English classes at nearly 60

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

104

2 branches in community centers across the city.
3 During my tenure, we developed a comprehensive
4 beginner level curriculum that had been widely
5 requested by both advocates and learners and was
6 missing from the curriculum. Now, the curriculum is
7 available at all levels of proficiency, not only
8 teaches English but connects immigrants to city
9 resources and services, helping our communities
10 navigate life in New York City with greater
11 confidence and independence. As with previous years,
12 language access remains a key priority for MOIA.
13 Over the last several years we've worked hard to
14 build an in-house team of experts that now provide
15 translation and interpretation services for mayoral
16 offices and technical assistance to over 45 city
17 agencies, helping them comply with Local Law 30 and
18 meaningfully expand language access across city
19 government. In April, we launched the I Speak
20 campaign as part of our Immigrant Heritage Week,
21 encouraging all New Yorkers to request services in
22 the language they're most comfortable with, and
23 reminding agencies of their obligations to provide
24 it. Community engagement remains at the heart of our
25 work as we seek to be an office deeply rooted in

2 community. In 2025 alone, MOIA's External Affairs
3 and outreach team has made more than 10,000 direct
4 touchpoints with immigrant New Yorkers through
5 resource fairs, tabling, Know Your Rights
6 presentations, days of action canvassing, and through
7 our Ask MOIA email and hotline. We also launched a
8 Know Your Rights for Immigrant New Yorkers campaign
9 across more than 4,000 digital screens across New
10 York City, ensuring that accurate multilingual
11 information is reached by communities citywide. In a
12 time of uncertainty and misinformation, MOIA's
13 communication efforts help ensure immigrant New
14 Yorkers receive information from trusted messengers
15 in their own language. For example, in recent months
16 we partnered with the Department of Health and Mental
17 Hygiene for multilingual media roundtable on
18 healthcare access and collaborated with the
19 Department of Housing Preservation and Development,
20 the Commission on Human Rights, and the Mayor's
21 Public Engagement Union for a press briefing on
22 housing rights. These events drew over 46 ethnic and
23 community media outlets with coverage in Chinese,
24 Urdu, Korean, Arabic, Spanish, Bangla, and more.
25 Combined, these stories received over one million

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

106

2 impressions, directly reaching immigrant audiences
3 with timely and accurate information. Lastly, I want
4 to thank the many public servants across city
5 agencies and offices who continue to show up for
6 immigrant New Yorkers and to our team at the Mayor's
7 Office Immigrant Affairs for their commitment and for
8 continuing to show up for all immigrant communities.
9 I am proud of what we accomplished together and I
10 remain committed to ensuring New York City remains a
11 national model for immigrant services and
12 opportunity. Thank you again for the opportunity to
13 testify and I look forward to your questions.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you,
15 Commissioner. We've also been joined by Council
16 Member De La Rosa. A couple of questions from me,
17 and then I want to really turn it over to the Chair.
18 During the Preliminary Budget hearing you stated that
19 the Immigrant Rights Collaborative was planning an
20 additional Know Your Rights workshops in schools and
21 had a goal of completing 240 workshops. Could you
22 tell us if we've met that goal or how we're looking?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Yes, we have
24 not met that goal, but we are on our way. We
25 currently have about 80 trainings left.

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. And could
3 you give us an idea of how the borough equity shakes
4 out there? How many are happening in each borough?
5 Are you trying to do an equal amount in each borough?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: So, I don't
7 have the borough breakdown, but I can tell you that
8 the way that it was designed it was to prioritize
9 folks who are shelter, schools and faith-based
10 institutions, and I do have the breakdown there if
11 you want that.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yeah, that'd be
13 great.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: So, in
15 shelters, we've done about 52 trainings so far. In
16 schools, we've done 47, and then 14 have been at
17 faith-based institutions.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And has the cruelty
19 and chaos coming from Washington impacted attendance
20 at these workshops? Better or worse, or?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I think
22 there's been several things that have impacted
23 attendance, but I can say that there has been-- when
24 we first started the workshops there were more people
25 coming. Because of that, we had to pivot. So

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

108

2 instead of doing in-person we had to move to doing
3 them online to meet the low decline in numbers.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So, there's no
5 additional funding added in FY26 for the Immigrant
6 Rights Collaborative. Do we assume that the program
7 will be discontinued beyond FY25?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: If I can
9 add-- thanks for the question. So, the Immigrant
10 Rights Collaborative was an emergency push as part of
11 our office to increase a number of Know Your Rights
12 workshops. So that was something that we did for the
13 second half of FY25. In FY26, the Immigrant Rights
14 Workshops program itself continues and is fully
15 funded. So, we will continue to fund the 17
16 community-based organizations that have been
17 contracted yearly to continue that work.

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Did you ask the
19 administration for more funding considering
20 everything that's going on right now?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: We have
22 been in close communications with our partners at OMB
23 to assess the needs of our programs.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. During the
25 Preliminary Budget hearings, you stated that MOIA

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

109

2 were developing an internet for all city agencies to
3 better access MOIA's resources. Could you give us
4 the status update of that, and when do you anticipate
5 it might go live?

6 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes. We're working
7 with our multiple city agency partners to develop
8 this in internet and we'll be launching very soon.
9 We're hoping to be launched by the next fiscal year.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: What's the budget
11 for the project?

12 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We are using
13 existing funds for this project.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: You're-- they're
15 making you use your own MOIA funding? They're not--
16 the funding is not housed in a different agency?

17 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: No. We're working
18 closely with our partners out of OTI to develop this
19 website using existing funds.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And how does MOIA
21 utilize ethnic media to keep New York in general and
22 immigrants, in particular, informed?

23 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes. We hold
24 ethnic and immigrant media roundtables on a regular
25 basis. We aim to have at least one per month, if not

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

110

2 per quarter. As I mentioned in my testimony, we held
3 recently two very successful immigrant media ethnic
4 roundtables, one to highlight access to healthcare
5 and another to highlight immigrant rights in housing.
6 This is incredibly important work that we prioritize,
7 because we know that over a third of New Yorkers
8 access media or news through their language community
9 outlets.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We Speak NYC and
11 the MOIA English Learning and Support Centers, I see
12 the Executive Plan includes just about \$620,000, but
13 that's compared to \$1.1 million last year. Why was
14 the budget for We Speak NYC reduced?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: So, for
16 next fiscal year in FY26 we have secured in the
17 Executive Plan about \$600K, as you mentioned. We
18 continue to be in close collaboration and
19 communication with OMB to continue to assess the
20 needs and funding that is-- that will be needed--

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] But
22 why was it reduced so much?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Again, the
24 fiscal-- in Fiscal 25, we were happy to receive that
25 additional funding from our partners at OMB, and we

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

111

2 continue those conversations with them as we get
3 closer to the adopted plan.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I just think it's
5 crazy that OMB would be reducing your funding at
6 moment like this. Blink twice if you agree.

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: What I will
8 add is that the funding that you currently see
9 reflected is the baseline funding for the program.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Right.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: And we'll
12 continue to work with our partners at OMB.

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: But I mean, do you
14 think the programs is going to be negatively impacted
15 by that funding cut?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: We're in
17 communications [inaudible] partners. We will be
18 continuing our partnership with the libraries, and
19 you know, again, with OMB to hope to, you know, to
20 continue those conversations for additional funding.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Do you have a sense
22 of how many participants attended the We Speak NYC
23 classes last year?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Yes, about
25 1,434 individuals.

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: And was there a
3 contingency plan or-- for the folks that you served
4 who are attending classes at shelters that might now
5 be closed?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: And sorry,
7 Chair, I actually misspoke. So, in-- because you
8 said last year. So, in 2024 about 5,152 individuals
9 attended the classes. During our current calendar
10 year, so from January through March 31st, 2025, about
11 1,434 individuals.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: So, what about the
13 folks who attended classes at shelters that are now
14 closed?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Can you
16 repeat the question? I'm sorry, I missed that.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Sure. What was the
18 backup plan to continue serving those who were
19 attending classes at shelters that are now closed,
20 migrant shelters?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: So, the--
22 the classes that are being held at shelters are run
23 by our colleagues over at OASO. The focus of the
24 classes that they were providing were intermediate
25 level. Folks who have completed those classes are

2 open to join an intermediate level class at any NY--
3 New York Public Library site that's participating in
4 the program. So, a referral pathway is existing
5 [sic]. The beautiful thing about We Speak, it's also
6 that individuals have the ability to take classes on
7 their own and use the material that's existing on our
8 website which is also available to all the learners.

9 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: And Chair, if I
10 can, just to give you more sort of awareness about
11 the program-- about two years ago we decided to fund
12 the New York City Public Library branches so that
13 they can provide these English classes across their
14 system so that we can connect newly-arrived
15 immigrants both in the shelter system and in our
16 immigrant communities with access to these classes.
17 Prior to that, classes were provided by community-
18 based organizations on a voluntary basis, and we
19 thought that this would be a good way for us to
20 spread across, better spread across these classes.
21 Now, you know, with the available funding we will
22 continue this partnership with the New York Public
23 Libraries and we hope to continue to add resources to
24 that.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

114

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: I want to talk a
3 little bit about the City's collaboration with the
4 State. The State FY26 enacted budget includes little
5 over \$80 million for different immigrant-related
6 programs. Does MOIA every collaborate with the
7 State's Office of New Americans?

8 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, we're in
9 constant communication with our Office of New
10 America, State Office of New Americans. In fact, you
11 know, we fund-- we contract with many of the same
12 providers including Catholic Charities that also
13 oversees their hotline. So, we have regular calls
14 and we speak on a regular basis. You know, again,
15 this is work that's important to both offices and we
16 work very closely with them.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Alright, I'm
18 going to turn it over to Chair Avilés.

19 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Chair, if I may?

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yes.

21 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Just to add to our-
22 - your question on the immigrant and ethnic media
23 work. We've held eight roundtables in the last
24 fiscal year in 2025, and our next roundtable will be
25 on worker rights and immigrant communities which

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

115

2 we'll be looking to highlight the important rights
3 that immigrants regardless of their immigration
4 status have and what to do if they have been victims
5 of workplace exploitation.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you,
7 Commissioner. Chair? We've also been joined by
8 Council Member Hudson.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. Alright. So,
10 let's start with-- by talking about the Legal Support
11 Centers. So, in Fiscal 26 Executive Budget for
12 MOIA's Legal Support Center includes \$12.2 million
13 for Action NYC, aka Legal Support Centers, \$5 million
14 for Asylum-seeker Legal Assistance Network, ASLAN,
15 and \$2.8 million for the Asylum-seeker Resource
16 Navigation Center. Can you clarify what portion of
17 the \$12.2 million for Action NYC is new funding
18 versus baseline funding from the previous fiscal
19 years?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: So, the
21 baseline funding for legal services is around \$7.9
22 million and the difference is the additional funding
23 that we'll be seeking in FY26.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, the remaining \$6
25 million and some is additional one-time funding?

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

116

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: That's for
3 Action-- you know, for legal services at MOIA.
4 That's \$7.9. so that's the number that that
5 includes. The-- in terms of the \$12 million that
6 you're asking about in terms of legal services, we'll
7 still get an additional-- I think you're referring to
8 the additional funding that's reflected.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: \$4.3, yeah.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Yeah.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I had to do the math
12 now.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: It's the
14 \$4, yeah, that we got added in the Exec Plan.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: That's one-time
16 funding .

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Yes.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And that's coming
19 from where?

20 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: OMB.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Is that coming from
22 the OASO money?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: I would
24 defer to our colleagues at OMB, but that was added to
25 our--

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: You don't know where
3 the money came from, you're just happy to have it.

4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: My-- yes, exactly.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Of course.

6 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: But my
7 understanding is that it's not coming from the state
8 funding that OASO received for this work.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. So, of the
10 \$12.2 million, how much is being distributed directly
11 to providers?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: So, in FY26
13 we have the Legal Support Centers. Hold on. Give me
14 one sec, if I can turn to my chart. So, total for
15 legal services, I think this will make a bit more
16 sense for-- to talk about this. For FY20-- here we
17 go. FY26 the new 25 MOIA Legal Support Centers will
18 get \$6.3 million about. That's what we have been
19 budgeted for. On top of that, as the Commissioner
20 mentioned, we will be extending contracts for some of
21 the current legal providers under the formerly known
22 as Action NYC contracts, and that will be about \$11.9
23 million. I think there's a bit of-- sort of to flesh
24 out your numbers, the \$12 million that you're talking
25 about is what's added in the Exec Plan, right? So,

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

118

2 some of that funding-- that funding is a one-time
3 funding that we have got, and that includes the \$4.4
4 million that we received from the administration, the
5 formerly known as ASLAN which is the \$5 million in
6 the-- for the-- and the funding for the program
7 formerly known as the Navigation Center. I think
8 that's what you referring to, Chair. I'm sorry for
9 the confusion.

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: No, that's okay. I
11 have a couple different numbers floating around my
12 head. So, in terms of-- in terms of the legal
13 support centers, so essentially despite all the
14 changes in the contracts, it's the same amount of
15 money for the contract more or less from last year,
16 just a lot more organizations. Right? I mean--

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: It's more.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, you said \$6.3
19 million is going in Fiscal 26. I have here Fiscal 25
20 was \$6.4 million.

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Correct.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So--

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ:

24 [interposing] So, it's going to be more, right? In
25 FY26 MOIA is consolidating programs, right, under the

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

119

2 MOIA Immigration Centers, right, and all available--
3 you know, and receive funding in FY26 will be added
4 to that effort. So, through the baseline funding that
5 we have, right?

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Let me stop you for
7 just a quick second. I'm sorry. I just want to make
8 sure I'm understanding, because I feel like I keep
9 hearing different things. So, of the \$12.2 million,
10 \$6.3 million has been awarded for Fiscal 26.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: So, I
12 think-- let me go back.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay.

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: I think we
15 were talking about-- so, the \$12 million that you're
16 talking about, that's the funding that has been
17 added, right, in FY26 in the Executive Plan. That is
18 not baselined funding. That's additional funding
19 that we have received as part of, you know, the
20 Executive Plan. So that's-- you know, that's a one-
21 time added funding that we've received.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, you're saying
23 the \$12.2 million is in addition to the \$7.9.

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Correct.
25 Apologies for the confusion.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

120

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. So, in-- still
3 even then, back to how much is going to be
4 distributed to providers. So you noted \$6.3 million
5 for Fiscal 26 which is less than Fiscal 25.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: So, that's
7 for the current contracts. For the-- I mean-- I'm
8 sorry. For the new contracts starting July 1st that
9 was sort of the new centers will be established. On
10 top of that, we are extending 13 of the current legal
11 services contracts formerly known as Action NYC--

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] Okay.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: for one
14 additional fiscal year. Then that will be about \$12
15 million for 13 of the-- for 13 contracts.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, you're going to
17 extend 13 contracts for an additional year, and then
18 you're going to award an additional \$6.3 million.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: For the new
20 contracts that--

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] And the
22 new contracts will start when?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: July 1st.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And can you provide
25 the Council with a list of providers and their

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

121

2 funding allocations for this Fiscal 26 allocation
3 that you've already made?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Sure, we
5 can share that.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Great. Thank you.

7 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: And Chair, if I
8 may, we're working towards as of today having--
9 starting July 1st or in July 38 MOIA Legal Support
10 Centers across New York City in neighborhoods where
11 immigrant communities live.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you,
13 Commissioner. Just for the record, we want to make
14 sure the \$12.2 million that we were talking about
15 includes the \$5 million from the Asylum-seeker Legal
16 Assistance Network and the \$2.8 million from the
17 asylum-seeker Navigation Center.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Correct.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Alright. So,
20 starting in Fiscal 26, programs like the Asylum-
21 seeker Legal Assistance Network and the resource-- we
22 got to find shorter names-- and the Resource
23 Navigation Center are inclusive of the Legal Support
24 Center. Why were these program's funding
25 consolidated into a single budget, and will they

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

122

2 still be run from the same provider? I guess it's an
3 overlap of the last question.

4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: In part, to address
5 your last point to limit confusion as to where
6 immigrants can access services, we want to provide
7 the resources so that these centers of the nonprofits
8 can provide legal services and other services. We're
9 prioritizing, of course, legal services, because that
10 is what is in high demand. Jas, do you want to add
11 to that?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: I'll start
13 and then I'll pass it on to my colleague Lorena as
14 well. Yes, it's part of consolidating the work, the
15 work that has been done through the Asylum-seeker
16 Assistance Network known as ASLAN, has been legal
17 services that will be folded into the services that
18 are being provided by these current contracts. So,
19 it's-- you know, and we're also ensuring that we
20 increase the number of access points for immigration
21 legal services for all immigrants, right? Whether
22 they're recent arrivals or, you know, they're-- you
23 know, have been here in the City for many years or
24 are also, you know, perhaps hold some sort of
25 temporary status. But I'll pass it on to Lorena.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Yeah, the
3 only point I'll add is that during the Preliminary
4 Budget hearing over half of the public testimony
5 focused on increasing legal services. So, in a
6 response, but also in a response to the need that
7 we're seeing from folks from around, we thought this
8 was the best approach to fold into to create
9 additional touchpoints for legal services.

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah, especially
11 since we filed tens of thousands of asylum
12 applications to an office that is now closed with no
13 information on what to do for those folks. So, yeah,
14 we need it pretty bad. So, in terms of the-- how will
15 MOIA ensure coordination and efficient utilization of
16 resources to avoid duplication in services across the
17 Legal Support Centers/Action NYC?

18 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, we of course,
19 work very collaboratively with the other agencies
20 that house immigration legal service programs like
21 DSS, HRA, OCJ. In fact, our immigration legal hotline
22 refers individuals to these services and we'll
23 continue to work with them individually and as part
24 of our immigrant taskforce that we coordinate,
25 interagency taskforce that we coordinate.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

124

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it. And I'd like
3 to recognize Council Member Brewer and Council Member
4 Bottcher joined us. Will the ASLAN legal support
5 recipient contracts end, and are they being notified?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: All of our
7 contractors of our legal service contractors have
8 received notification as of last week. We are
9 scheduling follow-up calls with them. The idea here
10 is to fold services, and we're going to be working
11 with them in the next couple of weeks to figure that
12 out with them together.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: When you say fold
14 services, can you explain that?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Based on the
16 last statement you said, in order for us to not
17 duplicate services and to sort of streamline, that's
18 what I meant by that.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it. Thank you.
20 In terms of-- so the official start date for the new
21 contracts under the new Legal Support Action Center--
22 I just totally merged the two names. That's what's
23 happening in my brain right now. You're going to give
24 us-- were they all notified of their contracts, or
25 has those determinations been made?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: So, all
3 current and new vendors that will start July 1st have
4 been notified. With regards to the new vendors that
5 are starting on July 1st, they are working closely
6 with our partners at DSS. They're working through
7 their contracts, but more to come.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And were there any
9 providers that were previously funded under Action
10 NYC that did not receive contract renewals under this
11 new model?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: In terms of
13 contract renewal-- extensions--

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] Right.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ:

16 [interposing]

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: There's the
18 extension.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Right.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And then there's the
21 new model.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Under--
23 with regards to the extension, we had conversations
24 with all current providers to propose what that-- you
25 know, if they were interested in that extension. All

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

126

2 but two providers did not submit proposals. So, in
3 terms of the current legal providers, really just two
4 of them did-- will not be extended for another year
5 because they were not interested in submitting that,
6 you know, proposal. Regards to the new contracts, you
7 know, again because we're still in the presence of
8 these contracts being set up, I can't go into-- you
9 know, list out the current selections, but that will
10 come in the next couple of weeks.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: But are you aware--
12 so, in terms of the extensions, too, that were not
13 interested, are you aware why they were not
14 interested?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: We held,
16 you know, multiple, you know, reached out. We just
17 do not hear back other than saying that they were not
18 interested at that point in time to submit extension--
19 - an extension.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, they did not
21 inform MOIA why they were not--

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ:

23 [interposing] They did--

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: interested?

25 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: not.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

127

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: They ghosted you.

3 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Not ghosted
4 us, but they didn't go into the specifics.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. In terms of
6 the renewals-- so sorry. In terms of the new
7 contracts, obviously there was an expansion in the
8 numbers of providers. I think, Commissioner, you
9 mentioned up to 25 in this new provider list.
10 Essentially, the money hasn't increased in that pool.
11 Are those contracts significantly smaller?

12 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, to clarify on
13 the numbers, of the baseline funding we'll establish
14 25-- let's call them MOIA centers-- in the next
15 fiscal year starting July 1st. Together with the
16 extension of contracts, we'll have another 13 which
17 amounts to 38 MOIA centers across New York City.
18 Once we have that full list, we'll be publishing that
19 online. We'll make sure Council Members have that
20 full list, and we'll let you know if any of these
21 centers are located in your districts so you're aware
22 of services available there.

23 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, there's no
24 overlap between the extensions and the providers, the

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

128

2 new providers under the new contract? There's no
3 overlap there?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: There will
5 be some overlap, and we will be sharing that in the
6 next couple of weeks.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Because
9 some of these contracts are still in the beginning
10 stages.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Right, in the
12 process.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Right, but
14 then there will be some overlap.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I would imagine.
16 Unless you secretly grew providers overnight, it has
17 to be overlap there. So that's what we're interested
18 in understanding. In terms of the-- what were some
19 of-- and I know we've discussed this before, but
20 certainly as the new contract will take hold, can you
21 remind us for the record what some of the primary
22 reasons for changing into this new contract model
23 was?

24 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Partly is to
25 establish legal-- MOIA Centers or providers within

2 immigrant communities so that residents can access
3 these services in their own neighborhoods through
4 providers that are most, I think, adequately
5 established in these communities to provide
6 culturally and linguistically sensitive services.

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Yeah, I'll
8 briefly add to that. You know, it's also to ensure
9 that these new providers, right, are also encouraged,
10 right, to-- and we will be working with them to build
11 those connections and relationships with other public
12 institutions within those-- within their
13 neighborhoods, like schools, libraries, as well, to
14 be able to grow-- to grow their network, but I'll let
15 Lorena also add a bit more.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Yeah, and
17 I'll add that aside from the language-- excuse me,
18 the Legal Support Centers, there's also a legal
19 technical mentorship component to it which was meant
20 to very intentionally create a way to find support
21 for legal services for very niche matters to some of
22 these smaller nonprofits. But I just want to
23 emphasize what the Commissioner said. I think the
24 idea here was to create a very hyperlocal focus where
25 legal service providers had brick and mortar that

2 folks could go to, immigrant New Yorkers could go to
3 within the five boroughs.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, are you saying
5 under the last contract that that did not exist? I'm
6 going to-- I'm still trying to understand what the
7 differences are besides more providers.

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I'll let the
9 Commissioner expand, but I think the idea here is to
10 create more, more touchpoints, really, in ways that
11 individuals from different neighborhoods could come
12 and provide services. I'll also say that needs have
13 changed. So, the types of legal service providers
14 who were needed to provide and respond to some of
15 these changes was super important. In addition to
16 that, the idea really, again, to the mentorship
17 program's capacity building. Like, you mentioned
18 sort of jokingly, but truthfully, the idea is to
19 create more, more legal service providers that can
20 support different ethnic enclaves, and sort of the
21 idea here is to build the capacity within some of
22 those new legal support centers that might have that
23 capacity to do so.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah, I'd love to
25 definitely hear more about the technical assistance

2 component, but certainly the needs 100 percent have
3 changed. At least people need full representation.
4 They don't need just like pro se anymore, and you
5 know with the changes in the federal policies that
6 existing cases are now much more complex. So, just
7 without changing much of anything, the complexities
8 that are needed within legal service provision have
9 significantly increased across the board without
10 addressing even additional new needs. So, 100
11 percent-- I just-- I guess I'd like to dive in later
12 on about, like, is there real capacity building
13 there, because from what we're understanding what's
14 happening on the ground now is everybody is
15 completely under water, and because of decreased
16 resources, supervision structures are weakening.
17 People have too much caseload, and those have been--
18 and the service, the amount of money that the City is
19 offering to nonprofits is not sufficient by any
20 stretch of the imagination. So, it's still-- we
21 still have this real significant challenge. In terms
22 of-- how many people and what demographic does the
23 new model propose to serve?

24 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, I'll let DC
25 Sanchez or DC Lucero weigh in on that, but just

2 wanted to add to the model what differentiates the
3 work of MOIA and the programs that are housed in
4 other agencies is that this model increases the
5 number of let's say touchpoints of immigrant
6 communities to city-funded programs which is why
7 we've decided to establish these 38 centers in
8 immigrant communities so that people know where to go
9 to if they were need to immigration legal services or
10 other services. I think that's been an effective
11 model for us to be very much rooted in community and
12 districts, neighborhoods where immigrants live. And
13 from there we'll connect them to city services
14 available to them and to other providers. And I
15 think that's what we're doubling down in this new
16 model. Not to say that we will cease to work with
17 existing providers, which again we said we will be
18 extending contracts for this next fiscal year.

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Sorry,
20 Chair, can you repeat your question at the top?

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah, we were
22 somewhere else. What-- how many people does the new
23 model propose to serve?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: We're
25 determining that number now, because we're beginning

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING> 133

2 the conversations with our contracted providers. And
3 I think the other part of your question was--

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing]
5 Demographic.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Also, we'll
7 circle back.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And wondering if
9 there's any distinction there from the prior model?

10 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Once we finalize
11 conversations and finalize agreements with the
12 selective providers, we'll be able to better assess
13 that, but our goal is to again spread the services
14 across immigrant neighborhoods in New York City and
15 to provide as much linguistic and cultural diversity
16 amongst these providers.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. So, how does
18 it look for our home community? What's the change
19 that Sunset Park is going to see from the old model
20 versus the new model?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: With--
22 we're, again, with-- I can't really share the list of
23 providers, but there will be an overlap in terms of
24 the services. We are looking to ensure that, you
25 know, we continue to have full coverage in all five

2 boroughs, especially in neighborhoods like Sunset
3 Park, right, where we have a large immigrant
4 community, that we have centers either, you know,
5 really close by and/or directly in those
6 neighborhoods so that folks can get these services.
7 With regards to the linguistic and cultural
8 sensitivities, right, we were very intentional in
9 this procurement to ensure that we continue to
10 prioritize that. So, you will see that also
11 reflected in the providers. And I will just really
12 quickly add with regards to the new contracts listed
13 on July 1st, you know, while there's overlapping,
14 we'll see new vendors, right. This is part of
15 building that capacity, you know, of smaller CBOs and
16 being in community-rooted organizations that are
17 providing this work as well in collaboration with the
18 new contract. So, that will be starting July 1st for
19 legal, technical mentorship for these new contracts.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, the ratio for
21 the new CBOs that you're trying to build capacity in,
22 what's the staffing ratio?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: We can
24 share that in the coming weeks as we're--

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] It's
3 in the RFP. Wasn't it in the RFP, the--

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ:
5 [interposing] Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: staffing ratios?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: I don't
8 recall that from the top of my head, but yeah.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I think it was. I
10 just don't remember.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Yes, but
12 it's-- yeah, so all of-- of course, all of the
13 selected, you know, vendors have met that, right?

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Right. So, one of
15 the problems-- I don't know if you were able to solve
16 this or you took it into account, was that the
17 staffing ratio was inadequate for what the contract
18 was hoping to achieve. Did you change at all the
19 contract? I know this has been a long, long process.
20 Was that ever addressed in the contract? Was the
21 staffing ratio improved because it-- from the former
22 contract had diminished quite a lot which goes
23 against actually what needs to happen. So, did you
24 change the staffing ratios in this final round?

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: If I can, I'll step
3 in while Jas pulls that up. We did make significant
4 amendments based on feedback we received from, you
5 know, the first versions of the RFX, and these
6 amendments were made to, you know, make sure that
7 there was maximum flexibility for providers,
8 including allowing them to-- and Jas can weigh in--
9 allowing them to decide how they would staff their
10 programs at the amounts we had put the RFX out for,
11 which is \$250,000 per year for three years. Again,
12 our preference is for our providers to be able to
13 decide how to best staff their programs to meet those
14 deliverables.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it. And so
16 currently, do you-- does MOIA have enough staffing
17 capacity to manage the rollout of the programs, or do
18 you need additional staff lines to support these
19 programmatic roles?

20 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We, of course,
21 always welcome additional staff. We're-- you know,
22 we've made a number of adjustments within our team to
23 be able to invest, manage the rollout of these
24 programs and provide adequate oversight.

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I'm not even going
3 to do it. How many team members are currently
4 dedicated to policy work to immigrant services, and
5 what are their main priorities under the new model?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: For policy
7 work we currently have three individuals focused on
8 that work.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Will they be working
10 as part of the new RFP model?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Two of them
12 will.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I'm sorry?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Two, two of
15 the three.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Two of the three.
17 And what are their priorities under the model?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Well, one
19 will be working closely with the legal service
20 contractors, providers, to field and provide support
21 with the legal mentorship, the technical component of
22 it. So, we can work closely, but also provide timely
23 updates to our Legal Support Centers, and the other
24 we'll be supporting with the Legal Support Centers.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

138

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it. And has the
3 RFP made any accommodations for the increased
4 complexity of existing cases?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I'm going to
6 say yes. The contracts as they are provide more
7 flexibility so folks can meet deliverables based on
8 the needs that are emerging. But again, more to come
9 as we finalize them.

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Have you requested
11 additional headcount to expand MOIA's team in the
12 near future to mee the demands of the Legal Support
13 Center?

14 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Again, we work
15 closely with OMB to determine this. You know, we
16 have an existing headcount, 63 staff. We have-- how
17 many vacancies, 13 vacancies? Thirteen vacancies,
18 we're working to fill those up. I think part of the
19 reason we've established the technical assistance and
20 mentorship program was so that they can also provide
21 adequate assistance to the nonprofits that we're
22 contracting, which is why this program is essential
23 to the work that we do.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, you haven't--
25 you haven't requested additional staff from OMB?

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

139

2 You're working on filing the 13 vacancies. Okay. So
3 with the news of the nationwide blitz where ICE
4 agents are entering courthouses to arrest immigrants
5 and undermine due process now as we've seen in the
6 Bronx, what long-term strategy is MOIA pursuing to
7 secure the resources that will be needed in the years
8 ahead to shore up and expand capacity?

9 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: A lot of work is
10 focused on our interagency coordination working
11 across agencies and offices so that we're in close
12 coordination and communications. For instance, we
13 understand that our school system is concerned about
14 this weekend's incident and one of our providers as
15 was reported in the news, stepped in to support the
16 individual and their family. We'll be working
17 closely with the public school system and other
18 agencies in such a way so that we can understand the
19 needs on the ground in the community as they occur.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, Commissioner, we
21 saw just last week many, many ICE agents in the
22 courts. What has MOIA done in response to this?

23 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Again, it's
24 essential for our immigrant communities to be well-
25 informed of their rights and of the available

2 services available to them which is why we've doubled
3 down on our communications efforts, and wherever
4 possible we are communicating directly to them about
5 these rights and services that they should know of.

6 As--

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] Has
8 MOIA gone to the courts to offer that service or
9 direction to people who quite literally are being
10 detained when they think they're getting a check-in
11 or going for any other court issue?

12 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Not the courts, no.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. Okay. I'd
14 like to acknowledge we've been joined by Council
15 Member Hudson and Joseph. Sorry, thank you. In
16 terms of the rapid legal-- the Rapid Response Legal
17 Collaborative, we know that this program offers legal
18 supports to individuals who are detained or at
19 immediate risk of detention and deportation,
20 particularly those who have not had-- or do not have
21 the opportunity to appear before an Immigration Judge
22 or subject to expedited removals which we are seeing
23 happening quite a lot. The Executive Plan includes
24 \$500,000 in Fiscal Year 26 for this program and the
25 funding remains unchanged compared to last year's

2 adoption. In Fiscal 25, the Council allocated an
3 additional \$1.2 million to three providers for this
4 program. Can you tell us how many people this
5 program served in Fiscal 25?

6 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, before Lorena
7 answers this question, DC Lucero answers this
8 question, just to clarify, while MOIA has not shown
9 up to the courts or any of the other sites, our
10 providers, the nonprofits that we contract to work
11 directly with the immigrant community are in constant
12 communication with their clients about any risks that
13 they might face as they show up to court or to their
14 check-ins and so forth, which is essential to do this
15 work prior to any instance that there may be-- that
16 they may face non-local law enforcement and possible
17 action.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah, no, the
19 providers are under water. That's why we requested
20 such a significant expansion of legal services
21 support, because the City is expecting the providers
22 to do everything and then some without sufficient
23 support. So, yes, they are there but I would like to
24 know as a city agency who provides counsel and
25 guidance to other city agencies, how are you engaged

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

142

2 with court personnel if we see this continuing harm
3 that is being done in the court system here? So, I
4 was asking specifically how MOIA is engaging with the
5 courts around this issue. So, can we get back to how
6 many people the program served, the Rapid Response
7 Legal Collaborative?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: In FY25
9 there were 88 screenings.

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And are there any
11 wait lists for this program?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I'm going to
13 say yes, yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Do you know how many
15 people are wait lists?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I don't, but
17 I can try to get that before the hearing's up.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: When the Rapid
19 Response Program first launched, it was shared as
20 priority for city and state. Has the state continued
21 to fund this program, or is it just fully funded with
22 city dollars?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: It's fully
24 funded by city dollars.

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

143

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. So, given the
3 flow of deportation cases, has MOIA formerly
4 requested additional funding for the Rapid Response
5 Legal Collaborative from OMB?

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: We continue
7 to be in close conversations with them.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: But did you ask them
9 for additional funding this program in particular?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Not in
11 particular, legal services.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. So, in terms
13 of-- we're going to switch to unaccompanied minors.
14 The number of unaccompanied minors continues to
15 increase. The absence of clear, sustained investment
16 raises concern about the City's preparedness and
17 long-term strategy for supporting this vulnerable
18 population. Is there any funding in Fiscal 2026
19 budget to address the needs of unaccompanied minors
20 arriving in New York City or those who are facing
21 Immigration Courts?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: So, I don't
23 have the number, but I know that-- I can say that we
24 are working with ICARE, the coalition that supports
25 some of this population to figure out a need. I also

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

144

2 don't have the latest, but I know that ICARE house,
3 the Department of Social Services. I just don't have
4 the number with me.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, the program was
6 defunded, I'm sure you're aware, at \$14 million,
7 several thousand children. Is the administration
8 going to add any funding for unaccompanied minors?
9 The cases haven't disappeared. They still sit with
10 the providers with no money.

11 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, this is work
12 that our colleagues at ACS oversee. We're working
13 closely with them and providers to see what-- if the
14 City can do with respect to this population. We
15 again, we're also very concerned about the children
16 that are left without services.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Did MOIA ask OMB
18 specifically for funding for this program?

19 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: MOIA didn't--

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] For
21 unaccompanied minors.

22 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: MOIA did not ask
23 for this as-- for this program, as it's overseen by
24 ACS. I defer to them to answer this question.

25

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, you defer to ACS
3 to do advocacy--

4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: [interposing] On
5 the--

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: for unaccompanied
7 minors?

8 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: No, we've raised
9 concern, of course, about the impact of providers and
10 of the children that are left without legal services,
11 but again I defer to ACS to answer questions on their
12 program.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And how is-- how is
14 MOIA then coordinating between the agencies, in
15 particular to support the holistic wellbeing of
16 unaccompanied minors? Are you gathering ACS,
17 education, housing? Are you doing any interagency
18 gatherings specifically for this vulnerable community
19 that has been defunded by the Federal Government?

20 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I know services
21 with respect to youth, children, families is part of
22 our ongoing conversations through our Immigrant
23 Interagency Taskforce, and again, you know, the
24 programs that are specifically overseen by ACS and
25

2 other agencies, they request funding for can say more
3 about their needs.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Right, Commissioner,
5 but MOIA's role, right, is-- remind me what the role
6 if MOIA is for city agencies?

7 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, again, it's to
8 help them-- help convene and coordinate across
9 programs, but again, ICARE is something the Office of
10 Civil Justice oversees in collaboration with ACS, and
11 I defer to these agencies to weigh in on their
12 budgets.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. So, have you
14 convened and coordinated on unaccompanied minors and
15 the situation we're currently in?

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: So, MOIA has
17 spoken to both the Department of Social Services and
18 ACS in regards to some of the cuts that we were
19 seeing federally in addition to also speaking
20 directly with folks from the ICARE Coalition.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. That's all.
22 I'm trying to get a sense of what is this action that
23 is happening. Is it-- are there meetings? Are there
24 actually requests for funding? What is the level of
25 action that is happening when we have seen a straight

2 defunding of some of the most vulnerable folks in
3 immigrant communities, right, children in particular.
4 So, I'm sorry I keep asking the question, but I just
5 want a very specific answer. Either you did or you
6 don't do it, or you're in the process of it, and this
7 is what it looks like, this is what we're
8 recommending or not recommending. So, has the
9 administration, again, considered long term
10 strategies for unaccompanied minors who-- especially
11 those who are aging out of youth services, but still
12 require support?

13 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Again, you know,
14 this is an ongoing issue, and we're working with
15 impacted agencies and providers to figure out what
16 might come next. Again, that got left by the
17 defunding of this program by the Federal Government
18 is vast, and no one city can, you know, close the
19 gap.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay, I'm going to
21 ask one more question and then I'm going to turn it
22 over to colleagues. I know you have places to go.
23 Thank you for being here. Really quickly-- so in
24 Fiscal 26 we see that the funding for OASO was zeroed
25 out. At the last-- well, I don't know if it's the

2 last hearing. We understand that there were 27
3 positions that supported that office with funding.
4 Considering-- can you tell us what is happening with
5 all those 27 positions and resources?

6 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I can't speak to all
7 of the 27 positions. I know that some individuals
8 have gone onto other agencies and offices. We are in
9 ongoing conversation about if any will come to MOIA,
10 but nothing concrete yet.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, you don't-- you
12 don't know if any will be deployed to MOIA?

13 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We're in ongoing
14 conversations, but no, we don't know concrete.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Do you know what
16 happens with all the casework that was started under
17 OASO, the tens of thousands of cases that they opened
18 up for new arrivals?

19 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: With respect to
20 legal services, the services provided were on a pro
21 se basis. We'll be supporting those individuals that
22 need continued assistance through our immigration
23 legal service programs and other programs across the
24 City.

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And how will you
3 provide that support?

4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We're referring
5 individuals to contact our hotline or any of our
6 existing providers. You know, again, this is an
7 ongoing situation. As the Application Help Center
8 winds down, we'll be getting information to them so
9 that they can refer clients to us.

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Will MOIA be
11 receiving all of the center's infrastructure?

12 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: No, the Application
13 Help Cener will be closing, and we as of now don't
14 plan to subsume any of those resources.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, just for clarity
16 sake, I did an application through the Help Center.
17 I'm now living somewhere. Help Center closes. I'm
18 supposed to know where to go to open or check on my
19 application or to get further support, because I'm
20 calling the MOIA help line? That's the understanding
21 with the tens of thousands of cases will find their
22 way to MOIA.

23 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: They will have our
24 hotline available and existing services. If they
25 were to call the hotline, they'll know, you know,

2 that-- not the hotline, the Application Help Center,
3 that it is no longer active. And again, when they
4 were provided with those services, the understanding
5 was that it was on a pro se basis, not for ongoing
6 legal support.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Right. Folks did
8 understand that. The City seemed to have a problem
9 with understanding the implications of that in the
10 long term. So, we've learned through recent
11 reporting that New York City plans to end case
12 management that helps new arrivals exit migrant
13 shelters. We understand that since 2023,
14 approximately 100,000 folks were serviced through
15 this case management program, services that include
16 finding legal aid, jobs, English classes. With
17 approximately 30,000 migrants still in our care, can
18 you tell us how many of them will be impacted by this
19 cut in case management services?

20 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, to clarify,
21 both with the services that you've mentioned in the
22 Application Help Center, these were all funded by
23 state resources which we were not allocated for the
24 next fiscal year. This is why those no longer will
25 continue, and again, many of these programs were

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

151

2 temporary as long as we had the resources to manage
3 them. We'll continue to support people through our
4 existing programs that we fund as a city, and just to
5 note that those under our care are largely
6 individuals that arrived not recently. So, they
7 would need a different set of services.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Right, but they're
9 still a significant amount with no real new dollars
10 to support the providers that are going to have to
11 support this caseload of work right now. Okay. So,
12 next, I'd like to call--

13 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Thank
14 you, Chair. We have questions now from Council
15 Member Louis.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you, Chairs,
17 and good afternoon, Commissioner Castro and to your
18 whole team. Had a lot of challenging conversations
19 with some of the groups in my district and parts of
20 Brooklyn and hosted some mediations amongst them,
21 because they feel that there's contractual provisions
22 that were unfair from your agency. So, I will ask
23 you some questions about that in hopes that we could
24 get some clarity and further conversation. How is
25 MOIA ensuring equity in the distribution of Haitian

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

152

2 Relief Initiative and immigration legal service
3 funding, particularly as smaller providers and CBOs
4 have raised concerns that much of the funding is
5 going to larger organizations like Catholic
6 Charities, or with organizations with stronger ties
7 with MOIA like Life of Hope? My second question is,
8 how is MOIA preparing to support Haitian TPS holders
9 and West African migrants that are now in portions of
10 Brooklyn? Given the high risk of similar revocations
11 and how with the \$1.7 million Haitian Relief
12 Initiative baseline funding from HRA's budget be
13 coordinated to support humanitarian crisis support?
14 And my last one is in regards to your testimony. You
15 mentioned that MOIA will be launching MOIA
16 Immigration Legal Support Centers, about 25 of them.
17 The numbers were all over the place regarding the
18 \$6.3 million. but I wanted to know who are the
19 nonprofits that you all will be contracting with to
20 provide this legal support, and what are the metrics
21 that you will utilize to identify those contractors?
22 Those three questions.

23 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you, Council
24 Member. DC Sanchez will answer some of the contract
25 questions, but I'm happy that the Haitian Response

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

153

2 Initiative in this Executive Budget for Fiscal Year
3 26 will be baselined which allows us to then discuss
4 how the process to allocate the funds as a baseline
5 project will look like. I'll let DC Sanchez talk
6 about some of the other contractual issues, but
7 again, the MOIA centers that I mentioned, some of
8 them are funded through our baseline funds which will
9 be 25 centers. Others will be funded through one-
10 year contracts.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: That's what's
12 going to get you to the 38.

13 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: That's going to get
14 us to 38, and--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: [interposing] Will
16 you provide those locations and have conversations
17 with us before that process starts or before the
18 launch happens?

19 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, we'll provide
20 the list of locations and the providers very soon,
21 and have-- and make sure to let Council Members know
22 if any of them are located in their districts.
23 Because it's-- there are ongoing contractual
24 conversations. I think DC Sanchez can talk more about
25 some of the limitations to do with that, but

2 certainly, we want to make sure to work closely with
3 Council Members on this.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Thank you.

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Thank you
6 so much for the question. So, with regards to the
7 new MOIA Immigration Legal Center that will start in
8 July, I'll start with that. So, that process was
9 through an RFX that was set nearly a year ago. So
10 there's, you know, a process in place.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: What was the
12 metrics that you used for that?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: So, there--
14 just a procurement process that is in place.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: Like an RFP.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Yes, it's
17 an RFP that went out. This whole process is
18 currently overseen by-- in collaboration with the
19 Department of Social Services where contract--

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: [interposing] It'll
21 be good to see what that looks like, what-- how the
22 metric is made up for the criteria for the RFP. And
23 because my time is up, I would like to know what
24 support are you using for Haitian relief and for the
25 West Africans if all that is being bunched in

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

155

2 together to support these two populations in the
3 midst of what we're going through, in the midst of
4 this crisis. What does that look like?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: So, really
6 quickly, so all of our centers-- MOIA Immigration
7 Legal Service Centers are open to all immigrants. We
8 do have folks that speak multiple languages, and we
9 do have, you know, the centers do have Language Line
10 available as well to support. And then with regards
11 to the Haitian Response Initiative, this was an
12 initiative that started back in FY23. It has been
13 year-to-year funding, right? This was a rapid
14 response that had to be put together, you know, and
15 it has been-- we have been advocating for this
16 funding to be baselined, right, to be able to plan--
17 to best plan long-term. You know, thankfully, as of
18 next fiscal year, FY26, that has been baselined for
19 the outer years. So now, MOIA is in a better
20 position to plan what the future of that response
21 initiative looks like, right, and to address some of
22 the concerns that have been brought up to you.
23 Because now--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: [interposing] It
25 would be good to meet with us so you actually

2 understand the concerns, instead of internally
3 trying--

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ:

5 [interposing] That would be good.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LOUIS: to manage that on
7 your own. It's not a equitable process with who you
8 have in place right now. And I was part of that
9 movement that came together to make sure that this
10 initiative was pushed through, but it's still not
11 equitable to this day. So, it'd be good to have a
12 conversation and meet with more than one member to
13 have a thorough conversation. Thank you, Chairs.

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Now we have
15 questions from Council Member Hudson followed by
16 Brewer.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you so
18 much. I have broader questions and then some
19 specifics in my district. Since January 2025, ICE
20 has steadily increased its activity in our city and
21 providers continue to receive an uptick in reports of
22 ICE arrests or attempted arrests in New York City.
23 We know that ICE has picked up people at routine
24 areas like near schools, places of worship and many
25 more. What is the administration messaging to those

2 who fear deportation and no longer want follow-up
3 with their doctor's appointments or are even willing
4 to miss school?

5 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yeah, I think it's
6 important to communicate clearly with our immigrant
7 communities that they're entitled to these services.
8 As I did in my testimony, I made sure to communicate
9 directly with immigrant communities. I do so through
10 immigrant and ethnic media on a regular basis. That
11 said, there's a lot of confusion, so it's important
12 to continue to repeat this message.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: And how does the
14 administration propose to deliver services to
15 detained and non-detained immigrants facing
16 deportation? Is there a continuation of services?

17 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, there will be
18 a continuation of services. The services provided
19 are through our, of course, nonprofit contractors,
20 and they're allowable-- their contracts allow for
21 this to occur.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: The contracts
23 allow for them to deliver services to both those who
24 are detained and non-detained immigrants facing
25 deportation? Just to be clear.

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: What need is
4 there for additional resources and how much of an
5 expansion do you think would adequately meet the
6 needs for immigration legal services?

7 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: As I shared at the
8 last hearing, the demand-- the demand for immigration
9 legal services exceeds the need in our communities,
10 especially as more communities need legal screenings
11 and support such as legal permitted residents. So
12 we're very much aware of that.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Is there a
14 number?

15 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I said in the last
16 hearing, we're speaking about over a million non-
17 citizens that could use some type of immigration
18 legal service.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Over a million
20 non-citizens, but is there a financial number, an
21 equivalent to that, that would be useful to support
22 those needs?

23 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Advocates have put
24 this number at hundreds of millions of dollars.
25 Again, you know, we-- we have programs not just at

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

159

2 MOIA, but at other agencies that look to meet the
3 needs of the highest vulnerable populations, but
4 again, as things change at the federal level, more
5 communities are of course impacted.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, thank you.

7 And then three years ago, the Hall Street complex
8 opened in my district with almost no advanced notice
9 from this administration, housing roughly 3,500
10 migrants with minimal support. My office immediately
11 stepped up to serve both our new neighbors and long-
12 time Clinton Hill residents. We hosted a major town
13 hall with elected officials to address shelter
14 capacity, organized two-- may I continue, Chairs?

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yes.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you.

17 Organized two resource fairs offering legal aid, food
18 and clothing. We ran donation drives and delivered
19 supplied directly to families in need, and we
20 partnered with schools to enroll newly-arrived
21 children, all without much help from the
22 administration. Looking ahead, how does the Office
23 of Immigrant Affairs plan to use its budget to better
24 support both the short and long-term needs of
25 migrants coming to our city? And do you believe

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

160

2 there should be dedicated funding and resources for
3 migrant and refugee resettlement?

4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, first of all,
5 thank you, Council Member, for the support you've
6 provided to our immigrant communities at Hall Stret
7 and in your district. this is one of the reasons, one
8 of the major reasons why we've made changes to our
9 model so that MOIA centers are located in immigrant-
10 dense communities so that we have better coordination
11 and communication directly in the districts where
12 immigrants live or where we've, you know, temporarily
13 housed them. We're making-- we're learning from the
14 last several years and making adjustments. Again, in
15 terms of resettlement programs, it's hard to say. We
16 provide case management assistance for people to find
17 their own housing within New York City neighborhoods,
18 but of course affordability is a crisis that all New
19 Yorkers have experienced.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Right, but I just
21 want to be clear. Do you believe there should be
22 dedicated funding and resources for migrant and
23 refugee resettlement?

24 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I want to be
25 careful in how I answer this question. I think, you

2 know, New York City should limit-- so migrant
3 resettlement has been an effort conducted by the
4 Federal Government, and immigrants should have the
5 choice to resettle or settle wherever they think is
6 appropriate. I'll leave that there.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay, thank you.
8 Thank you, Chairs.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, questions
10 from Council Member Brewer followed by Joseph.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. My
12 first question is-- I think for your workshops, the
13 ones that are most successful in Manhattan are the
14 ones at the restaurants. Are you doing those? Are
15 those some of your restaurants that get-- are the
16 restaurants getting workshops? The workers in the
17 restaurants.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: So, the
19 priorities have been-- but also welcome and
20 opportunity be we have some pending workshops that
21 are still available through our Immigrant Rights
22 Collaborative. Our priority were HERRCs, so at the
23 physical HERRCs, libraries, as well as schools. So,
24 as of now, we might have trained workers who worked
25 at restaurants but not physically at a restaurant.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

162

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay . but so
3 you would be open to doing workshops in restaurants--

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: [interposing]
5 Yes.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's where
7 folks are. So, yes, you would be working to do that?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Yes, to fill
9 the gap, be more than happy to support workers.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, we need
11 that. Second, I'm very-- I'm familiar with many of
12 he African young men, because they're in my house and
13 they're in my neighborhood, and I'm up to here with
14 them. And my question is healthcare. So, they all
15 have NYC Care. They have no idea what to do with it.
16 Some of their friends got Medicaid awhile ago. Not
17 now, obviously. So, I guess my question is just
18 generally-- this is a group-- I mean, they don't who--
19 - they don't know who Taylor Swift is. They're like
20 in another world. And so my question is how do you
21 communicate with them about these issues? I can't.
22 I'm doing the best I can, but they don't know where
23 to get healthcare. They don't know-- they know to go
24 to school. They sort of know to get on the bike and
25 do the deliveries. It's another world. Fulani, I'm

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

163

2 learning Fulani. I'm pretty good at it right now.

3 So, my question is how do you communicate with a
4 group like this and how do you tell them how to get
5 healthcare, etcetera? Who does that?

6 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, thank you,
7 Council Member, for your work. This is why our work
8 with community-based organizations is important.
9 That said, to get to scale we have to work with
10 Health + Hospitals and our healthcare system overall
11 which is why we held the immigrant media roundtable a
12 couple of-- a month ago, so that we can get this
13 information out through news outlets that they read
14 in their own languages. Again, it's challenging,
15 because a lot of these languages are what we term
16 languages of limited diffusion, so we have to find
17 every which way to get to them.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And then
19 the other question I have is just in terms of those
20 that leave the shelters. Obviously, the Row and the
21 Roosevelt, in terms of those families, are closing in
22 June. So, is that the responsibility of H+H
23 caseworkers or your caseworkers? How does that
24 information get transferred as to where they're

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

164

2 going, what their questions are, etcetera? There are
3 a lot of families in both of those hotels.

4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yeah, I know case
5 workers at H+H are working very hard in the next
6 several weeks to make sure that people get
7 information that they need. Those who are
8 transferring to the Department of Homeless Services
9 should also get information through that agency.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, so you
11 think that's enough? They'll be able to handle that?
12 And then what happens-- you don't know to the H+H
13 case workers, do they go to Health and-- do they go
14 to DHS? Do they have contracts that end, or we don't
15 know?

16 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, their
17 contracts are ending. They've been informed. Many
18 of them are transferring to other agencies or other
19 work.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It would seem to
21 me that they would be helpful because they're so
22 knowledgeable about some of these cases. Is that
23 something that somebody's paying attention to?

24

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

165

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, they would be
3 great additions to any team, because they know the
4 work on the ground with these communities.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Just
6 finally, also, we work a lot every day with CUNY in
7 terms of their support. Is that an organization that
8 you fund, or do they get their funding elsewhere?
9 CUNY Citizenship.

10 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes. We fund CUNY
11 Citizenship now.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, and they
13 are funded to do the actual case work for people
14 getting asylum or immigration or green card,
15 etcetera, is that correct?

16 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Correct. They
17 partly have funding from us, but also other funders.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Do you have
19 senses generally how much federal dollars totally--
20 when we had the cultural groups here, they actually
21 gave a number from Cultural Affairs of \$23 million as
22 to what was cut from the cultural groups. Do you
23 have some sense of what has been cut for immigration
24 from the God-awful federal people?

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

166

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: As was mentioned
3 earlier, it's in the tens of millions. I mean, it's
4 an ongoing situation. So, it's quite significant.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Is that
6 something down the line you could give us a number?

7 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We can make an
8 analysis, yes.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, that would
10 be helpful. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Questions from
12 Council Member Joseph followed by Salaam.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you,
14 Chairs. Couple of questions-- Commissioner, how are
15 you? About that New York City student that they
16 detained in ICE, what kind of support are you
17 providing for the family? And when young people are
18 going to court-- and that's what the Chair was
19 referencing, unaccompanied minors as well, but
20 accompanied minors as well. What kind of support is
21 MOIA providing for young people?

22 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you. Thank
23 you, Council Member. Because of the sensitivity of--

24 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: [interposing]
25 Yeah.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

167

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: particular
3 individual cases, we don't often share specifics.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Right.

5 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: But as was reported
6 through the media, one of our providers, NYLAG,
7 stepped in and is supporting the individual and the
8 family. We're very proud of the work that our
9 providers do in this respect. Generally speaking, if
10 any individual family needs support, they can call
11 our hotline or reach out to any of our providers to
12 see how we can help, and then often we also get
13 [inaudible] on our end.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Is those
15 providers listed somewhere that families know where
16 to go to? Are they also provided to New York City
17 public school students or families, immigrant
18 centers? Because I know this was one of our very
19 case, but from this case we can learn how to better
20 support New York City public school students who will
21 face ICE.

22 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, we have a list
23 of our existing providers which, again, you know,
24 that will grow and we're working to roll out a new
25 version of that list as more MOIA centers are added,

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

168

2 but yes, all of our agencies have this list available
3 to them. We also have an extensive directory on our
4 website that people can use. It's a mix of
5 organizations that we contract with and don't, but
6 that's available to them as well.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you.

8 Wanted to circle back to and talk about We Speak NYC.

9 I know that's a program I used widely when I was
10 teaching. Is that in partnership with D79?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: No.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: It's not.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: This is a
14 program that is run solely by MOIA.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Solely by MOIA,
16 but in the Executive Plan, you only have \$617,000
17 compared to the \$1.1 million that was added last
18 year. So why was the budget reduced by \$615,000 in
19 Fiscal 2026 compared to 2025 in the Adopted Budget?
20 Is it due to the closures of the HERRC centers as
21 well? Does that play a role in that?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: No, that's
23 an independent program. You know, we still are in
24 close conversations with OMB about the opportunity
25 and potential to add additional funding to this

2 program in next school year. The \$617,000 that you
3 see reflected in FY26, that's the baseline funding,
4 and we'll continue to work with OMB to look at--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: [interposing] But
6 if you need to expand you will? Chair, can I?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: And if I may
8 add, Council Member, to your question regarding D79,
9 we do work with them to encourage them to send
10 student to one of our many sites within the library
11 system.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Was that funding,
13 the \$630,000, was that repurposed to Immigrant Rights
14 Collaborative in FY25 since the program will not
15 continue-- was not continued in fiscal 2026? How
16 were those funds reallocated or absorbed?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: So, that
18 funding for-- that was in FY25, you know, due to high
19 need that we saw at the end of 2024 leading up to,
20 you know, to inauguration, there was a high demand
21 with regards to Know Your Rights, right? So, given
22 the limited funding that we had, we made a decision
23 to pivot that funding and fund additional Know Your
24 Rights workshops with current providers, as well as,
25 you know, do a large print of materials that have

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

170

2 been developed by our office in our public-- in our
3 website to be able to print those out for contracted
4 MOIA vendors and also for Council offices as well.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Do you have a
6 number of how many folks attended this We Speak NYC
7 classes last year?

8 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Yes, in
9 calendar year 2024 about-- the exact number is 5,152,
10 and currently from January 1st, 2025 through March
11 31st, 2025, 1,434.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Why the drop in
13 numbers?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: It's mostly
15 because we haven't completed the calendar year. So
16 it's only until March.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay. Do you
18 have breakdown of locations, boroughs, sites, and why
19 is the Bronx most underserved in the six locations
20 that you have?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: I do have a
22 breakdown. So currently for FY25 there's a total of
23 179 classes; 72 were in Brooklyn, 69 in Queens, 10 in
24 the Bronx, 26 in Manhattan, and two in Staten Island.
25 The makeup is really determined in collaboration with

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

171

2 the library systems, so that's sort of the reason,
3 but we'll be more than happy to sort of look into
4 that as well.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: That would be
6 great. And We Speak NYC is still successful in terms
7 of attracting new participants. What are the
8 criteria you use to measure success? And that will
9 be all, Chairs. What do you use to measure success?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: well, I
11 think for us, as you know, with this-- this is really
12 the entry point to English services, period. So, for
13 example, like my mom who might be shy to speak
14 English in front of people, this is sort of the place
15 where you get the very beginning fundamental. So for
16 us, metrics-wise is the number of classes that you're
17 attending, but also the ways that we are capturing
18 some of the information. So that's part of it, but
19 again, for us it's really encouraging learners to
20 continue their journey with intermediate level
21 classes and so forth.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Is there an exit
23 survey that folks take in order to say how well this
24 working or it's not?

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

172

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER LUCERO: Yes. I want
3 to say yes, I just don't have the number handy. But
4 overall anecdotally folks have said that it's been
5 helpful in encouraging them to continue their adult
6 learning classes.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you,
8 Chairs.

9 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Can I-- if I can,
10 Council Member, just to clarify. So, we have
11 baseline funding for this program, and then
12 throughout the year we often get additional funds
13 added to MOIA's budget which we then invest in these
14 various programs. Not ideal for our providers, and we
15 hear them, you know, be we are very committed to
16 working closely with them so that they know, right,
17 that this may come.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you,
19 Commissioner. Thank you, Chairs.

20 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Questions from
21 Council Member Salaam.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thank you and
23 good afternoon. I have a question about the
24 immigration legal services and the federal funding
25 cuts. Fiscal Year 26 Executive Budget includes only

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

173

2 \$4.4 million for immigration legal services which
3 falls far short of the \$190 million requested by the
4 City Council. How does MOIA plan to sustain critical
5 legal programs given this shortfall, especially in
6 light of the recent \$200 million in federal cuts that
7 have already disrupted services for over 1,000 open
8 cases in New York City?

9 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you for the
10 question, Council Member. The funds available to
11 MOIA for immigration legal services are not the only
12 funds available for this work. Other agencies also
13 have available funds for these needs. Do you have
14 the total number?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Yes. I can
16 also add that on top of the \$4.4 million that you see
17 in the Executive Budget, there were a couple of other
18 items added, \$1.65 million for the Haitian Response
19 Initiative, \$5 million for the program formerly known
20 as ALSAN, and \$2.8 million for the program formerly
21 known as Navigation Centers in the Executive Plan.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Okay.

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: And for the
24 entire city budget we have, I believe-- give me one
25 second to pull up the number. For the city budget,

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

174

2 the total immigrant legal services investment
3 citywide is \$42.6 million.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: And what is
5 MOIA's contingency plan for the 200+ impacted legal
6 service staff and pending minor asylum cases if
7 additional city support is not secured?

8 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I'm sorry, Council
9 Member, could you repeat the question?

10 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Sure. What is
11 MOIA's contingency plan for the 200+ impacted legal
12 service staff and pending minor asylum cases if city
13 support is not secured? Additional city support.

14 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I see. The
15 Application Help Center, you know, again, the-- we've
16 expressed our disappointment that the state funding
17 is not available to continue those services, and the
18 application help center will be closed by the end of
19 the fiscal year. As I stated before, clients will be
20 connected. Potential clients will be connecting to
21 our existing programs including MOIA's, and staff are
22 finding new employment at other agencies within our
23 nonprofit sector.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Chairs, just have
25 one last follow-up. Tell me what mental health

2 services for immigrants and asylum-seekers--
3 immigrant communities, particularly asylum-seekers
4 face unique mental health challenges, yet the
5 Executive Budget lacks dedicated trauma-informed
6 mental health funding. What steps will MOIA take to
7 address this gap and expand culturally competent
8 mental health support, and has MOIA coordinated with
9 DOHMH and/or H+H t develop a joint strategy to
10 deliver mental health services tailored to
11 undocumented and recently-arrived populations?

12 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I've been working
13 closely with the Commissioner, the Department of
14 Health and Mental Hygiene in recent months. We're
15 planning to launch an outreach campaign for this
16 summer, specifically for these reasons, both the
17 Commissioner and I will be deploying staff and
18 ourselves going into immigrant communities to ensure
19 that immigrant New Yorkers know of our existing
20 resources. We're also working closely with the
21 Mayor's Office of Community Mental Health to continue
22 to inform our residents. It's a priority for us
23 which is why the Commission and I will be working on
24 this joint project this summer. Thank you.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER SALAAM: Thanks.

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Chair?

3 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, in the vein of
4 mental health and just healthcare services in
5 general, are there any new specific investments that
6 are being made in Fiscal 26?

7 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I'd have to defer
8 to DOHMH and the Mayor's Office of Community Mental
9 Health on questions related to the budget. I don't
10 know honestly of any new investments, but we do play
11 a role in ensuring immigrants know about existing
12 resources, including their hotlines. And again, this
13 is going to be a priority of ours this summer as we
14 launch this outreach campaign.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: In terms of the
16 Federal Government right now, in this reconciliation
17 bill we see provision to penalize states that use
18 state-only funds to provide healthcare to
19 undocumented immigrants by cutting their federal
20 Medicaid funding. How do you see this potentially
21 affecting New York City and New York State's
22 healthcare initiatives to undocumented communities?

23 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, it's something
24 that I know that is of concern to our Health +
25 Hospitals and DOHMH leadership. We're looking at

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

177

2 potential impacts on our communities, and again, we
3 can't speculate about what may or may not happen, but
4 we'll be ready to respond when the time comes.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: In terms of-- given
6 that New York State has historically taken steps to
7 expand access to healthcare for all residents
8 regardless of immigration status, do you foresee the
9 proposed federal penalties forcing the state and city
10 to roll back any of these programs?

11 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We frankly don't
12 know. Though the City has been strong advocates of
13 expanding healthcare to all its residents, and that
14 you know, we have the adequate resources to be able
15 to meet those needs.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And in terms of--
17 how does MOIA plan to advocate at the state or
18 federal level against these policies could harm
19 immigrant access to healthcare such as provision in
20 the budget reconciliation bill? I'm sorry if that
21 didn't make any sense. But how do you plan to
22 advocate at the state or federal level against these
23 policies?

24 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We're in close
25 contact with our colleagues at DOHMH, again, you

2 know, working very closely with interim Commissioner
3 there to bring our teams together and think about
4 these things. As we hear of any changes or any
5 impact, we'll be able to respond together.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Have you made any
7 public statements about how harmful this
8 reconciliation bill will be to immigrant communities?

9 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: WE have not, but
10 both-- our three offices, Department of Health and
11 Mental Hygiene, Health + Hospitals, and MOIA put out
12 a letter directly communicating to our immigrant
13 communities about our ongoing commitment to our
14 communities regardless of their status.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I'm sorry. Did you
16 say you wrote a letter to immigrant community members
17 about the harms they're experiencing?

18 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: No, we wrote a
19 letter emphasizing our commitment to their care and
20 emphasizing that they can continue to access city
21 services regardless of their status.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it. And then,
23 well, in terms of-- if you haven't made any public
24 statement, have you made private statements to our
25 state partners about the harm of this? Have you made

2 any statements to our federal part-- who's left as
3 federal partners-- about the harm of this.

4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: we have not. That
5 is up to our Intergovernmental Affairs Office,
6 although we did put out with the Department of Health
7 and Mental Hygiene an op-ed emphasizing the
8 importance of healthcare programs to our immigrant
9 communities.

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Has MOIA explored
11 partnerships with ethnic media to ensure that
12 critical messages are reaching immigrant New Yorkers
13 in their native language, particularly about the
14 harms that are being proposed in this bill?

15 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Specifically about
16 this bill, no. although, as I said earlier, our
17 partners with immigrant and ethnic media is very
18 important which is why we hold these ongoing
19 roundtables. But a month and a half ago we held one
20 dedicated to healthcare, and we'll continue to hold
21 these moving forward.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: In Fiscal-- how does
23 the Fiscal 26 Executive Budget ensure continued or
24 expanded access to healthcare for undocumented and
25 uninsured immigrants in New York City?

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

180

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I don't have
3 specific details on the budget question. I'll have to
4 defer to my colleagues at DOHMH and H+H for that.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Have you recommended
6 any specific funding levels to ensure healthcare for
7 undocumented and/or uninsured immigrants in New York
8 City to your colleagues?

9 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Again, we have
10 ongoing conversations with our colleagues. We defer
11 any funding request to them, and since they oversee--

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] But
13 have you made any recommendations is my question.

14 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Specifically MOIA,
15 no.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. So, does the
17 Executive Fiscal 2026 Executive Plan include any
18 resources for improving language access in health-
19 related services for immigrants who speak limited
20 English or indigenous languages?

21 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: For health specific
22 language access, I'm not sure if we have that
23 information in front of us. Although, we do
24 coordinate language access across the City and we

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

181

2 have ongoing conversations with all other agencies
3 including DOHMH and H+H on this matter.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And has MOIA engaged
5 with the NYPD on their recent policy change given
6 bicycle riders criminal citations?

7 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: No.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Is MOIA aware of the
9 policy of NYPD giving bicycle riders and e-bike folks
10 who violate traffic violations criminal summonses?

11 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We're aware, but
12 have not engaged, no.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Do you think it
14 would be helpful for MOIA to provide recommendations
15 to the NYPD around the immigrant implications of
16 providing criminal summonses for traffic violations
17 rather than civil summonses which is what they did
18 before?

19 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Much of these
20 conversations will occur as we hold conversations
21 through our Immigrant Interagency Taskforce.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, when MOIA is--
23 when did MOIA become aware of this policy change?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: I don't
25 have the exact date, Chair.

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Perhaps when it was
3 in the newspaper when we all became aware of it, is
4 quite possibly-- but I guess now that you know that
5 it is happening, has MOIA affirmatively reached out
6 to the NYPD to say this is bad for immigrant
7 community members who rely on this mode of
8 transportation, to single them out and unfairly
9 provide a criminal summonses which could trigger
10 federal immigration detention and deportation?
11 Knowing that this policy passed, has MOIA
12 affirmatively reached out to say this is the wrong
13 thing to do?

14 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: This is not a
15 specific conversation we've had with the NYPD.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Does MOIA think it
17 should have this conversation with the NYPD?

18 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: These topics are
19 often issues that come up during our Interagency
20 Taskforce meetings.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Also, has MOIA been
22 keeping track of-- I think to a earlier point-- in
23 the courts, has MOIA been keeping track of ICE
24 engagement in the courts at all?

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: As much as others,
3 you know,-- as much as we hear of reports. Again,
4 there's little ways we can know about these instances
5 ourselves because we're not in any way coordinating
6 with non-local law enforcement.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Right. But MOIA, is
8 MOIA keeping track of any ICE engagement across the
9 City at all?

10 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, but again, we--
11 - it's hard for us to keep track, because we don't
12 know this information and we can't verify this
13 information, just like most people who are tracking
14 this.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Has MOIA ever
16 considered the potential of being a place where you
17 should track that kind of activity that could help
18 with both providers and residents engaged?

19 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: It would be very
20 difficult for us to do that.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. Okay, just I
22 think we've-- we've certainly belabored the point,
23 but as you are aware, the Council requested \$109
24 million increase for the immigration legal services
25 enhancement and was only granted \$4.4 million. do

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

184

2 you think \$4.4 million addition is sufficient to
3 address the current need?

4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Like I shared
5 earlier, the demand exceeds the need, and DC Sanchez
6 described the total amount that the City allocated
7 for this-- again, it's not just to MOIA, but other
8 agencies as well. If, DC, you want to add to that?

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: No, the
10 only thing that I will add that in the Executive Plan
11 there was a total of \$42.6 million added to the
12 City's Executive Plan for immigration legal services.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And give me the
14 breakdown of where that's going to, the \$42.6.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: That, I
16 will have to get back to you. I don't have that
17 specific breakdown, other than just MOIA's portion
18 which is the \$12.2 million that we discussed earlier.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Great, okay. We're
20 almost wrapping up here. In terms of budget and
21 staffing, you mentioned earlier that you had
22 currently 13 vacancies. When we last met, you
23 mentioned you had 11 vacancies. So you have
24 increased. Are you having challenges getting lines
25 hired?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Well,
3 currently-- unfortunately, since the last time that
4 we were here, we had a couple attritions added, so
5 that's why we have now more vacancies. We'll still
6 have now five candidates that are in the pipeline
7 that are still-- that are moving through the approval
8 and on-boarding process. Last time it was four. So
9 that's sort of what we're currently at, and we'll
10 continue to work with OMB to get those approvals, and
11 we're also posting some of these vacancies.

12 Currently, two positions are posted, and a few more
13 will come online in the next couple of weeks.

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, the five
15 candidates you have are the for the two posted
16 positions or they're for other positions?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: For other
18 positions.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. And how long
20 is it taking-- how long have those candidates been in
21 the pipeline for?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: It varies.
23 Some of them have been there for almost a little over
24 a month. Recently, others have been there, you know,

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

186

2 between, you know, six or more-- six to eight months
3 at the very least.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Well, that is a lot.
5 Have you experienced, to your awareness, candidates
6 that have withdrawn because of that lengthy hire--
7 six to eight months to get hired is enormously long
8 time.

9 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Currently,
10 we're very thankful and lucky that all of the
11 candidates are still very interested.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Holding on.

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Holding on.
14 Again, you know, this is on a case-by-case basis, and
15 you know, in terms of the onboarding process, and
16 again, we continue to work very closely with our
17 partners at OMB, you know, to be able to get those
18 approvals as soon as possible.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Do you know why it's
20 taking so long, six to eight months?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: I--

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] Or
23 waiting, they're still waiting. It could take
24 effectively longer than that. You have any awareness
25 what that-- what's contributing to that length?

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

187

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: I do not
3 have specifics, unfortunately.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Is this typical?
5 Have you seen this before? Is this kind of what it
6 is?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: It depends,
8 right? I mean, to be onboarded to the City on
9 average, you know, it takes a few months. So, yeah,
10 we continue to work with OMB and other folks to get
11 these folks on board as soon as possible.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Right. So,
13 currently MOIA staffing structure is you have five in
14 your agency and then everybody else is in different
15 agencies.

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Correct.
17 We have-- sorry. Yes, five lines under the Mayor's
18 Office, and then the remainder are split between the
19 Department of Social Services as well as DCAS.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: And are the
21 vacancies, are they concentrated on one or the other?
22 Are they across both DCAS and DSS?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Both, DCAS
24 and DSS. It's a bit of a mix.

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

188

2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it. And you
3 don't know to this point whether or not you're going
4 to absorb any of OASO's staff?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Not yet.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. Alright,
7 Chair, I think we're good.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, thank you all
9 very much.

10 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you, Chairs.

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SANCHEZ: Thank you.

12 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Just lastly wanted
13 to express my gratitude to both of you for convening
14 this hearing and to all our Council Members for their
15 work with immigrant communities.

16 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you,
17 Commissioner.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, we'll take a
20 10-minute break, and then we're going to have public
21 testimony. So, hang in there. Come on Alexa.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I have no energy.

23 [break]

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Alright, we're
25 going to get started with the public testimony

2 portion. I will now open the hearing to public
3 testimony. Just have to read this disclaimer. I
4 remind members of the public that this is a
5 government proceeding and that decorum must be
6 observed at all times. As such, members of the
7 public shall remain silent unless you're testifying,
8 of course. The witness table is reserved for people
9 testifying. No video recording or photography is
10 allowed from the witness table. Furthermore, members
11 of the public may not present audio or video
12 recordings as testimony. However, they may submit
13 transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant at
14 Arms for inclusion in our final official hearing
15 record. If you'd like to speak at today's hearing,
16 you got to make sure you fill out one of those slips
17 in the back and then wait to be recognized. Once you
18 are recognized, you'll have two minutes to speak on
19 today's hearing topics, either the Corrections
20 Department budget or the Mayor's Office Immigrant
21 Affairs. If you have a written statement or any
22 additional written testimony that you'd like to
23 submit for the record, just provide a copy of your
24 testimony to the Sergeant at Arms, and they'll bring
25 it up to us here. If you don't have it with you, you

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

190

2 may email written testimony to this email address,
3 testimony@council.nyc.gov. You got to do it within
4 72 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings
5 again are not accepted. Okay. First panel, we have
6 Monique Francis and Carmen de Leon. Okay, whoever
7 would like to start.

8 MONIQUE FRANCIS: I will start.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Go ahead.

10 MONIQUE FRANCIS: Good afternoon.

11 Greetings Council Member Brannan and Council Member
12 Avilés and the members of the Finance and Immigration
13 Committees. My name is Monique Francis and I'm here
14 the Interim Executive Director of CUNY Citizenship
15 Now. I'm here before you today on behalf of the 55
16 City Council-funded employees advocating for
17 continued funding for an organization that is making
18 a difference and empowering immigrants at a time in
19 our history when the people who built this nation are
20 being treated in a cruel and inhumane way. This
21 moment calls out for bold leadership, fearless
22 advocacy and the resources to ensure that every
23 immigrant in New York City has access to free, high-
24 quality legal assistance. After the 2024
25 presidential elections, we saw the need to marshal a

2 quick response and took proactive steps to alert all
3 of our networks. Our first call to action was to
4 submit applications for benefits under the outgoing
5 administration existing policies before the new
6 changes were enacted. We urge green card holders to
7 apply for citizenship or to apply to renew tier
8 status. We encourage those with work authorization
9 and other documents that were expiring to renew well
10 in advance of the expiration date. We prepared
11 informational materials and addressed the anticipated
12 changes for immigration policies and advise non-
13 citizens on proactive steps that we needed to take in
14 advance of January 20th. Following the January 21st
15 onslaught of Executive Orders targeting asylum-
16 seekers, parolees, and undocumented migrants, our
17 next call to action was to offer Know Your Rights and
18 family preparedness educational sessions to
19 community. We quickly saw the need to conduct these
20 sessions via closed Zoom webinars to protect those
21 seeking information and to ensure that everyone could
22 listen in the privacy of their homes. To-date, we
23 have completed more than 30 Know Your Right sessions,
24 educated thousands of immigrants, and provided
25 information that is crucial during this period. To

2 combat misinformation in the often-- that is often
3 circulated on social media, we found a variety of
4 channels to share accurate immigration updates. We
5 created a webpage to highlight and explain the policy
6 changes from DHS and USCIS. We sent emails to you
7 and members of your staff and alerted all of our
8 [inaudible]. We also have a weekly reoccurring
9 announcement in the CUNY newsletter which is
10 distributed to more than 550,000 subscribers.
11 Individuals affected by these policy changes
12 desperately seeks our help. Between January and
13 April, our contact center system received more than
14 21,000 unique phone calls, text messages and call-
15 back requests. This was a 30 percent increase in
16 volume since November 2024. We made every effort to
17 prioritize those who are calling to verify what they
18 were seeing and hearing in the news. For urgent
19 inquiries, we assigned an on-call attorney to
20 respond. Our team has been working tirelessly with
21 every group that is being targeted and closely
22 monitoring every lawsuit filed to counter unlawful
23 termination or revocation of status. We're offering
24 virtual appointments to those who request them. Our
25 LECOV [sic] staff holds case discussions and case

2 updates twice per week to ensure that everyone on the
3 team has accurate and updated information to share
4 with constituents. The demand for our services has
5 never been greater, which is something which we
6 anticipated. What we did not foresee was the
7 targeting of lawful permanent residents such as green
8 card holders and international students. Under the
9 new administration there's been an increase in
10 deportations carried out by ICE creating fear and
11 uncertainty within the community. Because ICE
12 officials have been largely targeting undocumented
13 immigrants-- have been unable to locate undocumented
14 migrants with violent criminal records, they've
15 shifted their enforcement efforts to those who are
16 lawfully in the United States using pressure tactics
17 to encourage self-deportation to meet their
18 deportation quota. Many immigrants are finding
19 themselves in harrowing situations, unsure of their
20 options. CUNY Citizenship Now is providing support
21 they need to make informed decisions about their
22 immigration posture. The reality is that for many of
23 us, United States is our home. We came here for a
24 better life and will remain regardless of who is
25 president. While the demand for services continue to

2 grow exponentially, our funding will not allow us to
3 meet these increased needs. We're seeking \$5 million
4 in funding for Fiscal Year 2026 which is a
5 restoration of the \$3.1 that we currently get and an
6 enhancement to \$1.9 million. Council Members have
7 asked us to increase our citizenship days throughout
8 the city and we are prepared to do so, but we need
9 those resources. Funding will allow programs to
10 expand by providing extra days of service at the
11 Council Member offices and creating a more robust
12 attorney triage hotline. Since our funding in 1997,
13 Citizenship Now has become a beacon of hope to New
14 York City, and we're committed to continuing to serve
15 front line providers-- serve as front line providers
16 over the next four years and beyond. We urge you to
17 maintain and increase support funding for our
18 services and for our program. Thank you for your
19 time and consideration. I look forward to answering
20 your questions.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

22 CARMEN DE LEON: Good afternoon, Chair
23 Justin Brannan and Chair Avilés of Immigration. I am
24 Carmen de Leon. I am the President of Local 768. I
25 represent the New York City healthcare employees. I

2 am also a Vice President to the Executive Board of
3 DC37. I am here today on behalf of my members who
4 work at Correctional Health. They are licensed
5 creative arts therapists who provide therapy in group
6 settings as well as the social workers who work at
7 Rikers Island on behalf of those that are
8 incarcerated, providing anything from mental health
9 therapy to advocacy and negotiations from within the
10 jail house itself, to the lawyers making connections
11 when they need them. I'm here today because my
12 concern of myself and my members is in regard to the
13 safety while working at Rikers, specifically for
14 Correctional Health. Recently, there was a Workplace
15 Violence Committee meeting from H+H with regard to
16 Correctional Health. They reported that there were--
17 in Fiscal Year 2024, there were 249 assaults varying
18 from a member being spat on to actual physical
19 assault. I am here to say that those are very--
20 numbers are very much underrepresented. They don't
21 report and my members in particular I can speak to
22 are encouraged not to report the violence or any
23 physical assaults. They have been told, "Well, you
24 just got punched in the eye, but you don't have a
25 black eye, and you'll be able to recover and come

2 back." That is an actual story from some of my
3 members. As well as bodily fluids being thrown at
4 those that are employed in Correctional Health. That
5 is usually one of the most prevalent ways of
6 assaulting someone. So, as we move forward, I am
7 asking the City Council to keep up their diligence in
8 regard to Correctional DOHMH-- I mean, sorry,
9 Department of Correctional as we go to move towards
10 to community-based jails. There's adequate
11 understaffing as it stands right now, and I can't
12 imagine that 3,300 beds is going to be enough to
13 service the incarcerated population, as well as
14 provide them adequate services. Thank you for your
15 time today, and I look forward to next year. Thank
16 you.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much
18 for your testimony. I just-- I want to ask you a
19 question, Monique. First, thank you, obviously, for--
20 - both of you for different services of your
21 constituencies. I know city relies heavily, and
22 certainly my office does, on CUNY Citizenship Now's
23 work across the City. Can you tell me-- I mean, you--
24 - in your testimony, clearly noted the increase, and
25 in one place you actually said 30 percent increase in

2 cases. From your perspective, has what you just
3 heard the City testify-- have you heard-- do the
4 changes that are being proposed and/or the modest
5 increases of funding, how do you think this is going
6 to impact the work that you're doing right now?

7 MONIQUE FRANCIS: So, we just lost
8 funding from MOIA. We received our notice last week
9 that they're cutting the ASLAN funding that they give
10 to us. So, I'm not sure how to respond to your
11 question on what the changes will be.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: But even in terms
13 of-- how about in terms of the question of the
14 complexity of cases? I think one thing you noted
15 was-- I think many people didn't realize-- was that
16 this administration would certainly even target green
17 card holders among others. We knew they were just
18 going to target everyone. How has that impacted the
19 level of service that you're able to provide?

20 MONIQUE FRANCIS: Well, the work that we
21 do is primarily pro se. While we say it's pro se,
22 folks still keep on coming back to us, because we're
23 there. We've been here for 28 years. So, even
24 though they get the, "We're not your attorneys. We
25 can only help you up to a certain point." They still

2 come back asking us questions. We still have to be
3 the support that they need, and that's one of the
4 differences between what we do and what other
5 programs in the City does.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. I think
7 what I'm hearing is and what I saw just a few minutes
8 ago is they're still cutting programs and patting
9 themselves on the back for adding money somewhere
10 else. Thank you for the work that you do.

11 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Council Member
12 Brewer has a question.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I just want to
14 say the same thing. Thank you both. I have to say,
15 my office, Citizenship Now CUNY is our go-to place.
16 You are streamlined. You are responsive. Everybody
17 gets service, and I just want to say thank you.

18 MONIQUE FRANCIS: You're welcome.

19 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Please add my name
20 to that pile as well. Okay, thank you both.

21 MONIQUE FRANCIS: I'll see you on June
22 7th.

23 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yeah, right on. I
24 appreciate you guys. Thank you. Okay, our next
25 panel we have Deborah Lee, Catherine Gonzalez, Karla

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

199

2 Ostolaza, Jodi Ziesemer, Louis Mancheno, Ernie
3 Collette, and Sophie Dalsimer. Okay, you want to
4 start from the-- my right, your left. Just hit the
5 button. There you go.

6 KARLA OSTOLAZA: Hi, good afternoon. My--
7 I'm Karla Ostolaza. I'm the Managing Director of the
8 Immigration Practice at the Bronx Defenders, and
9 thank you so much for the opportunity to testify
10 today. This council's leadership and vision made
11 possible the launching of the New York Immigrant
12 Family Unit Project 12 years ago, ensuring universal
13 access to representation for detained immigrant New
14 Yorkers. together with Brooklyn Defender Services and
15 the Legal Aid Society, we're requesting \$11.06
16 million for each organization, double our current
17 budget, to ensure we have resources proportional to
18 the mass detention and deportation campaign we're
19 fighting against. Since January we have witnessed a
20 staggering increase in detention, a trend that will
21 continue to escalate given the recent opening of the
22 Delaney Hall detention facility, Newark with 1,000
23 bed capacity as well as a new detention space in
24 Nassau County. Our recent clients include long-term
25 green card holders detained at JFK, undocumented

2 parents and spouses of U.S. citizens, [inaudible]
3 home raids [sic], and asylum-seekers detained at ICE
4 check-ins in front of their children while doing
5 exactly what our government asked them to do. Our
6 NYFUP [inaudible] staff has also stepped to defend
7 New Yorkers against new and expanded uses of federal
8 law. We're litigating against implementation of the
9 Alien Enemies Act which targeted hundreds of
10 Venezuelans for rendition into notorious prisons in
11 El Salvador. We're challenging attempts to use
12 expedited removal to deport New Yorkers without due
13 process, and we're fighting back against active
14 attempts by ICE to bring back deportation cases of
15 NYFUP clients which have been closed for nearly a
16 decade. We urge this council to act now to ensure we
17 have the resources to continue fighting back. Access
18 to NYFUP representation increases detained
19 immigrants' chances of success by more than a
20 thousand percent. We also lowered the social
21 economic cost of homelessness, foster care, and
22 unemployment created by immigration detentions and
23 avoidable deportations. We have represented
24 thousands of detained New Yorkers and have the
25 expertise to train new advocates and build capacity

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

201

2 to meet this moment with the Council support. Thank
3 you.

4 CATHERINE GONZALEZ: Good afternoon. My
5 name is Catherine Gonzalez. I'm a Supervising
6 Attorney and Policy Counsel at Brooklyn Defender
7 Services, one of the NYFUP providers here in New York
8 City. Thank you for the opportunity to testify
9 today. Now more than ever, New York City's NYFUP
10 program is needed to meet this unprecedented moment.
11 I want to highlight the ways in which the recent
12 federal policies and practices have affected clients
13 represented by the NYFUP program and why our advocacy
14 is needed today. NYFUP serves New York immigrant
15 communities in complex immigration matters in a
16 rapidly changing legal immigration landscape. This
17 complex nature of client's cases requires extensive
18 preparation and resources. The current federal
19 immigration enforcement policies have a range of
20 serious consequences for New Yorkers. Our offices
21 have continued to represent people whether detained
22 locally or transferred across the country which we're
23 seeing more and more. With the Supreme Court
24 allowing the administration to end TPS, for example,
25 more of our previously protected clients with

2 families and lives here in New York will be detained
3 and are being detained by ICE. With the weaponizing
4 of war powers against immigrants through the Alien
5 Enemies Act, people who we represent are being
6 threatened with removal to CECOT in El Salvador and
7 other third countries with no due process, and this
8 change has necessitated the filing of emergency
9 federal litigation to prevent the unlawful rendition
10 and disappearance of immigrant New Yorkers in removal
11 proceedings. After the Supreme Court case, we expect
12 to litigate on an expedited basis more individual
13 habeas petitions to challenge the use of the Alien
14 Enemies Act against our clients, and not just clients
15 from Venezuela, but other nationalities targeted by
16 recent State Department designations, including
17 people from Central America and Haiti. When ICE
18 arrests immigrants prior to the resolution of their
19 pending local cases here in New York, it is
20 infringing upon their ability to participate in their
21 local non-immigration court proceedings pending here
22 in New York. Funding NYFUP supports New Yorker's
23 ability to exercise due process in local proceedings
24 here in New York, including housing, family and
25 criminal court. Thank you so much.

2 DEBORAH LEE: My name is Deborah Lee and
3 I'm the attorney in charge of the Immigration Law
4 Unit at the Legal Aid Society. Thank you to the
5 Committees on Immigration and Finance for this
6 opportunity and your ongoing support. I'm testifying
7 in coalition with the New York Immigrant Family Unity
8 Project partners, but as well also the Immigrant
9 Opportunities Initiative contractors. We are now 127
10 days into this presidential administration and its
11 priority is to detain and deport as many people as it
12 can. This Federal Government is trying funnel more
13 non-citizens towards removal orders or otherwise
14 ready them for immediate deportation. In the past
15 month, the Department of Homeland Security began
16 requesting that the Immigration Court re-calendar
17 thousands of previously administratively closed cases
18 nationwide. Additionally, ICE is now detaining non-
19 citizens at Immigration Court, targeting them for--
20 targeting those who are complying with our
21 immigration laws and trying to have their day in
22 court. How can we fight against this onslaught. We
23 must take bold stands, like this council's fight to
24 keep ICE out of Rikers. We stand with you and will
25 not be complicit in sending more into this federal

2 government's deportation machine. Overall, in
3 addition to continued and additional support, we need
4 flexibility in our contracts. We are eager to do all
5 we can to defend non-citizen New Yorkers, but also in
6 our contracts to appreciate that immigration
7 detention may continue to expand and Immigration
8 Court cases require constant but prolonged
9 dedication. Critically, we need more NYFUP funding.
10 We are the City's and State's experts in defending
11 against imminent removal, but must have resources to
12 meet the complex reality of detained deportation
13 defense. Our NYFUP clients are now fighting in
14 Immigration Court, but also in federal courts against
15 unlawful removals under the Alien Enemies Act and to
16 third countries. Legal Aid is asking for \$11.06
17 million for each NYFUP provider. For IOI funding we
18 must prioritize legal representation in Immigration
19 Court. This is the most pressing need of non-citizen
20 New Yorker-- that non-citizen New Yorkers face and
21 our funding must reflect that. I do also want to
22 clarify MOIA's testimony regarding a continuum of
23 services. That is not accurate. We do not have a
24 continuum of services for somebody who is not
25 detained and suddenly becomes detained. Legal Aid is

2 also asking for \$1.75 million for our UMFI funding
3 and continue funding for our low-wage worker
4 initiative. Finally, we ask that all funding
5 reflects our full staffing needs and costs as our
6 staff are our frontline responders in these
7 tumultuous times, and we must be able to provide for
8 them. Thank you for this opportunity.

9 JODI ZIESEMER: Thank you. My name is
10 Jodi Ziesemer. I'm testifying on behalf of the New
11 York Legal Assistance Group or NYLAG. Our city has
12 repeatedly noted its commitment to our immigrant
13 communities. Legal service funding is essential to
14 preserve the rights of immigrants and keep families
15 from the harm of detainment, deportation and more.
16 We call for additional dollars to be allocated to the
17 city budget for these services. Increased investment
18 that supports innovative and flexible legal service
19 programming to respond to the ongoing and emergent
20 needs of our communities will give immigrant New
21 Yorkers a chance to live, work and thrive in our
22 city. As noted by this committee, response to
23 emergency enforcement action as we've seen when ICE
24 comes into our Immigration Courts and detains
25 respondents, when ICE arrests students at our city

2 colleges, and the need to challenge deportation to
3 third countries, and to preserve due process in the
4 deportation process requires flexible and robust
5 funding including programming such as the Rapid
6 Response Legal Collaborative and the Immigrant
7 Opportunities Initiative, IOI Collaborative. I will
8 note that this budget of Fiscal Year 26 does not
9 restore the \$600,000 in cuts for Fiscal Year 25 to
10 the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative. We are the
11 organizations that have responded to taking cases for
12 immigrant New Yorkers who are being detained and
13 deported rapidly. We are collaborating on both the
14 local and national level to supplement some of the
15 NYFUP funding and programming, as well as provide
16 emergency flexible legal response to the enforcement
17 actions that are coming at a very rapid pace. We
18 also do track and report back to MOIA about
19 enforcement actions. So that is something that,
20 again, that we ask for restoration of that funding in
21 order to continue those essential services.

22 LUIS MANCHENO: My name is Luis Mancheno
23 and I am the Citywide Director of Legal Services New
24 York City. I am speaking today on behalf of my
25 organization which is one of the organizations that

2 is constructed to provide legal services under the
3 IOI contract. As I was walking here today I was
4 thinking about exactly how I wanted to make sure that
5 we understand how bad things are for the immigrant
6 community today, and all I could think about was
7 walking by 26 Federal Plaza where a bunch of New
8 Yorkers and our sibling New Yorkers are facing
9 immigration proceedings, and I was thinking about how
10 just last week people who were coming for their
11 immigration removal proceedings were being picked up
12 and detained when all that they were doing was trying
13 to comply with exactly what they were supposed to do.
14 The reality is that things are much worse than they
15 have ever been. The work that our attorneys are
16 doing and our legal services providers are doing is
17 much harder than it has ever been. Chairwoman Avilés
18 was talking on asking about how bad things our for
19 our staff members, and the reality is that we do need
20 more funding. We are not able to do the work that we
21 have to carry out, especially today because we do not
22 have enough funding. In fact, IOI is defunded by
23 about \$12.5 million, meaning that we fund about 50
24 percent of the work that we do from other sources
25 that we have been able to find throughout these

2 years. The reality is that not only things are much
3 worse when we are litigating cases in front of
4 Immigration Court, but we also do not have those
5 sources of funding anymore. So, we're going to be
6 facing a situation where we are not going to be able
7 to provide the services that our New Yorker citizens
8 need so much when things are the worst level
9 possible. So, I ask you today on behalf of the
10 organization that I represent and the coalition that
11 we represent to please, you know, help us advocate to
12 get those fundings-- the funding that we need in
13 order to be able to provide legal representation that
14 is so vital for New Yorkers today. Thank you.

15 ERNIE COLLETE: Good afternoon. Thank
16 you so much to the Committee for allowing me to
17 testify. My name is Ernie Collette. I'm the
18 Supervising Attorney of the Immigration Law Project
19 at Mobilization for Justice. I appreciate, obviously,
20 all the City Council's efforts for holding MOIA and
21 making sure that we have truth to power with regards
22 to the finances and the numbers, and as many of my
23 colleagues have already discussed, quite frankly the
24 funding is just not enough for us to be able to
25 maintain and continue representing a lot of immigrant

2 New Yorkers. Thank you very much, Chairwoman Avilés,
3 for being able to sus out the numbers during the
4 testimony, but these are the numbers that I also feel
5 are very important for the committee to understand as
6 well. Currently,-- and this is just talking about
7 Immigration Court New York State-- as of March 2025
8 we have a little under a million people in
9 Immigration Court, and approximately of that million,
10 we have about 62 percent that are currently being
11 represented. It's that 38 percent that are pro-se
12 that really keep me up at night. I know that anyone
13 here on this panel and all the people that work for
14 our legal services organizations are going to give
15 them the best possibility of being able to stay here
16 in the United States, but that 38 percent is
17 incredibly under attack when we have an
18 administration that's trying to effectively
19 prioritize speed over due process, fast-tracking
20 removal proceedings, pre-termining [sic] or
21 terminating asylum applications that maybe were
22 considered to be adequate enough to get to the next
23 step, but judges are making the decision that they're
24 not. Of course, as we discussed earlier, individuals
25 being-- having their hearing terminated and then

2 being detained from ICE after leaving their hearing,
3 cases being re-calendared erroneously, and then just
4 policy changes in general with the OIR which make
5 cases more difficult, and that's only in Immigration
6 Court. The communication and the advice aspect is
7 fantastic. It's excellent for us to be able to talk
8 to clients, but as Monique mentioned, people are
9 coming back to the same organizations over and over
10 trying to get more help, and we're unable to do so.
11 We have a financial imperative here for the City, but
12 I also feel like we have a moral imperative as well,
13 and it's our obligation as a city of immigrants to
14 maintain that. I know you'll keep up the fight, and
15 we really appreciate it. Thank you.

16 SOPHIE DALSIMER: Good afternoon. My
17 name is Sophie Dalsimer. I'm Co-Director of the
18 Health Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the
19 Public Interest. Thank you, Council Member and Chair
20 Avilés and members of the Council for the opportunity
21 to testify today. I'm also very privileged to
22 testify with my colleagues here. I'm in complete
23 agreement with all of them. I want to speak to you
24 this afternoon about the City Council's Immigrant
25 Health Initiative which are privileged to be a part

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

211

2 of and ask that you continue enhanced support for
3 this program with a \$650,000 allocation to our
4 organization for this upcoming fiscal year. This
5 work could not be more critical in the face of
6 unprecedented federal assaults on immigrant community
7 and healthcare. I was concerned today about the lack
8 of specificity and urgency from MOIA when it comes to
9 healthcare access and mental health needs of
10 immigrant New Yorkers and their families. At our
11 organization we are receiving and responding to
12 increased demand across four main areas. First, more
13 and more people are being arrested and detained by
14 ICE as we know, and we field many requests from NYFUP
15 and other partners for medical advocacy on behalf of
16 immigrant New Yorkers in ICE detention, including
17 forensic psychological evaluations that are critical
18 to their immigration cases. Many of the individuals
19 who the city supported with pro se asylum assistance
20 are now coming up on their final hearings, and they
21 are unrepresented, and we are hearing from many of
22 those folks who are chronically ill or people with
23 disabilities who would have to face these proceedings
24 unrepresented. We also continue to provide
25 comprehensive health advocacy and insurance

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

212

2 navigation to support non-citizen New Yorkers who
3 face barriers to accessing healthcare, including
4 advocacy with New York City Health + Hospitals and
5 connecting individuals to NYC Care. This is even
6 more critical now as many individuals are forgoing
7 vital medical services in fear of ICE enforcement.
8 It has been critical to provide timely, accurate and
9 trusted advice for these communities. And finally,
10 NYLPI is responding to unprecedented demand from
11 healthcare workers themselves who are unsure about
12 how they can create safe medical spaces for their
13 patients and also protect their own safety. With
14 your continued and enhanced support, we look forward
15 to meeting these urgent needs and representing and
16 advocating for our immigrant communities. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: No, I just want to
19 say really quickly, we hear you in terms of the
20 overdue restoration of the legal services, and even
21 that wasn't enough. And I just want to expressly
22 thank you and obviously the panel before for the
23 services that you have provided in this ongoing
24 deteriorating conditions. We know y'all are the
25 front lines and people working really, really hard

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

213

2 with not a lot of support. So, I just want to thank
3 you and all your teams. And then I guess-- and also
4 for bringing in actual facts and urgency into the
5 room that we did not see and hear several hours ago.
6 So, I just have to acknowledge that. Thank you. And
7 we'll continue to fight for all New Yorkers together,
8 but deeply appreciate your services and your
9 testimony today.

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: We have a question
11 from Council Member Brewer.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. It'll
13 be very quick. First of all, thank you, NYLAG, for
14 stepping up for Dylan [sp?]. Thank you. And then
15 continuum of care, can you just-- I think I know what
16 it means, but when you say MOIA said something that
17 wasn't correct, can you correct it for us?

18 DEBORAH LEE: sure, and I invite others
19 on this panel. Again, and I also echo-- you know,
20 I'm really so honored to be on the panel with all
21 these superstars. So, with the NYFUP funding, we can
22 represent individuals who are otherwise unrepresented
23 who are venued [sic] here in New York City
24 Immigration Courts or in New Jersey, New York City
25 residents, but those are people who are unrepresented

2 when they are detained and we're intaking them. So,
3 and then the IOI funding, and other folks can jump in
4 as well-- the IOI funding, we're representing non-
5 detained people. So, there's this sort of-- there's
6 this gap that exists. And I think especially in
7 light of these dismissals in Immigration Court where
8 somebody's not in removal proceedings anymore, and
9 then they're going to be whisked away and likely not
10 be anywhere in the New York City area anymore, those
11 individuals are going to be disappeared. They're
12 going to be deported. And so I think there's just
13 this real sense of concern and urgency that these
14 people are going to be immediately sent away. We're
15 not going to see these people. We're not going to
16 see these New Yorkers anymore. They're going to leave
17 behind all their other families, other loved ones
18 there.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's very
20 helpful. Thank you. Just for the public to
21 understand. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
23 much for all you do. Okay, our next panel we have
24 Kennan Pauls or Keriann Pauls, I'm sorry, Sarah
25 Nolan, Sierra Kraft, Grace Day, Margaret Martin,

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

215

2 Lauren Migilaccio, and Michelle Sencion. You want to
3 start from my right, your left.

4 KERIANN PAULS: Good afternoon and thank
5 you to Chairs Avilés and Brannan and to the New York
6 City Council for the longstanding support of the
7 Legal Services for the Working Poor Coalition, aka
8 LSWP. I'm Keriann Pauls, and I am the Interim
9 Executive Director at TakeRoot Justice, one of the
10 five members of this coalition which also includes
11 CAMBA Legal Services, Housing Conservation
12 Coordinators, Mobilization for Justice, and NYMIC
13 [sic]. The LSWP Coalition was created with support
14 from the City Council 20 years ago to address the
15 civil legal needs of working poor and other low-
16 income New Yorkers whose income is just slightly
17 higher than the poorest New Yorkers, thus rendering
18 them ineligible for free legal services from many
19 organizations. In Fiscal Year 2025, each of the five
20 original members received \$455,000 from this
21 initiative and in Fiscal Year 26 TakeRoot Justice and
22 the other members of the LSWP Coalition are
23 requesting a \$600,000 allocation from the City
24 Council. This enhancement would support critical
25 legal services and allow providers to deepen their

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

216

2 impact in the areas where we are seeing increased
3 need, including immigration, workers' rights, public
4 benefits, and economic justice. This is especially
5 important in this moment as the Federal Government is
6 making it even harder for the working poor to
7 maintain financial stability and make ends meet, and
8 it is an exceptionally challenging time for our
9 immigrant communities, and just speaking on behalf of
10 TakeRoot Justice, I'll say that this fiscal year, the
11 majority of our LSWP clients are seeking immigration
12 legal support. So, when the City invests in legal
13 services for the working poor, we see that it's
14 investing in strategic preventive measures to keep
15 New Yorkers on their paths towards financial
16 stability and proactive intervention through access
17 to legal assistance helps protect wages, prevent
18 homelessness, keep families in their communities,
19 children in their schools, and New Yorkers out of
20 poverty. So, thank you again for your ongoing
21 support and consideration of our request for the
22 allocation of \$600,000 for each of our LSWP Coalition
23 Members. Thank you.

24 SIERRA KRAFT: Good afternoon, Chair
25 Avilés, Chair Brannan and members of the Committees.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

217

2 My name is Sierra Kraft and I'm the Executive
3 Director of the ICARE Coalition, a citywide network
4 of legal service providers that for over a decade
5 have ensured that unaccompanied immigrant children in
6 New York City have access to free legal
7 representation. Thank you for uplifting the needs of
8 unaccompanied children throughout the hearing this
9 morning. We're in a moment of urgent crisis, one
10 that is unfolding in real-time and in plain sight.
11 Unaccompanied children are being targeted through
12 harmful policies and systemic failures, and the
13 consequences are playing out in our neighborhoods and
14 court rooms every day. Children's dockets are being
15 fast-tracked. Kids are receiving court dates before
16 they've had a chance to find a lawyer. ICE agents
17 are conducting so-called wellness checks, showing up
18 at 6:00 a.m. at children's homes asking probing
19 questions, even when their cases are already closed.
20 These visits are sowing fear and mistrust in
21 communities that are already on edge. New sponsor
22 requirements like fingerprinting, background checks
23 and strict ID policies are keeping families apart.
24 We're watching family separation play out again here
25 in New York City, and recently we had a young teen, a

2 child just herself, who missed a hearing because she
3 was giving birth during her court hearing, but the
4 judge ordered her removed anyway. She didn't have a
5 lawyer and she turned to us, but our providers are at
6 capacity. This is what it looks like when due
7 process is denied. When children are forced to
8 navigate one of the most complex legal systems in the
9 country alone with everything at stake. We should
10 all be outraged. At a moment when legal services--
11 the need for legal services is exploding, the safety
12 net is collapsing. Federal dollars are unstable and
13 unpredictable, and the government is currently buying
14 themselves some time to dismantle protections that
15 would further endanger children and making it
16 impossible for them to plan for an attorney.
17 Nonprofits can't plan like this. Providers are
18 having to lay off staff, freezing intakes, and
19 turning children away. City Council has long been a
20 champion through the Unaccompanied Minors and Family
21 Initiative, but funding hasn't increased in over six
22 years despite the skyrocketing caseloads and rising
23 costs, and the landscape is shifting by the day.
24 Today, we're asking the City to meet the urgent need
25 of this moment, and that's why we're respectfully

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

219

2 requesting \$6.3 million through UMFI to stabilize and
3 sustain legal services across seven providers for
4 2,013 children and families and also \$5.4 million in
5 emergency funding to support the loss of federal
6 funding. New York State turned its back on these
7 kids in this year's budget, making the City's role
8 even more critical. We can't allow children,
9 toddlers, and teenagers to be railroaded through a
10 system they can't possibly navigate alone. Thank you
11 for your ongoing leadership, advocacy, and standing
12 for young immigrant New Yorkers.

13 SARAH NOLAN: Good afternoon. Thank you
14 for the opportunity to testify today, Chairs Brannan
15 and Avilés. My name is Sarah Nolan. I'm the Managing
16 Director of Kids in Need of Defense, known as KIND,
17 New York office. We are also here as a member of
18 ICARE Coalition. Kind thanks City Council again for
19 your support in providing free legal representation
20 for unaccompanied children. To add a little color to
21 Sierra's testimony, we are also here to ask for
22 incredibly important increased support for our work
23 to counter the relentless efforts to strip away legal
24 protections for unaccompanied children who are now on
25 the front lines of the mass deportation agenda. ICE

2 is conducting what they call wellness checks at homes
3 with the intent to intimidate and further traumatize
4 children and their sponsors. The reconciliation bill
5 that just passed the House eviscerates protections
6 for unaccompanied children and could charge them up
7 to \$15,000 for many of them to be released from
8 custody and to apply for legal status which would bar
9 them from accessing any kind of protection. The
10 administration's also seeking to end the Flores
11 settlement that limits the amount of time children
12 can be detained and requires they be held in safe and
13 sanitary conditions. We've seen children who would
14 have been out of detention within weeks be held for
15 now months because their parents and caregivers
16 cannot provide the ID or proof of finances for them
17 to be released. At this moment, unaccompanied
18 children are in dire need of secure, robust, local
19 funding for legal services as the future of the
20 federal support for this work remains very uncertain.
21 In March the federal contract that funded over half
22 of our work was abruptly cancelled. In the weeks
23 that follow, the children who would have received
24 kind advice and assistance under this contract no
25 longer had access to counsel. This included four

2 children who decided to return to their home
3 countries without their parents or legal guardians
4 even there to receive them. It includes a teen from
5 West Africa who has already been in foster care for
6 18 months who confessed to us later how scared and
7 confused he was to suddenly have to go to court
8 alone. It includes a four-year-old girl from Central
9 America who was separated from her grandmother at the
10 border. After litigation is filed and an injunction
11 was entered, federal funding for these services has
12 been temporarily restored, but the administration
13 continues to fight this case in court and signal its
14 intent to take away all protections from
15 unaccompanied children. We cannot rely so heavily on
16 federal funding in this climate to provide the
17 foundation for legal assistance that these children
18 so desperately need. Data shows immigration judges
19 are almost 100 times more likely to grant legal
20 relief when an unaccompanied child is represented by
21 counsel. This legal representation provided by KIND
22 and ICARE members is the key to increase stability
23 for unaccompanied children and safeguards them from
24 human trafficking and exploitation. We respectfully
25 ask City Council at a minimum to support the \$6.3

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

222

2 million in reduced funding requested by ICARE and to
3 allocate an additional \$5.4 million in funding given
4 the increased needs in the uncertain future of
5 funding. Additionally, we ask for the renewed
6 funding for the IOI initiative. Thank you so much
7 for your commitment to ensuring that all
8 unaccompanied children in the City remain safe and
9 achieve their full potential.

10 GRACE DAY: good afternoon, Council
11 Members, Chair Avilés, Chair Brannan. My name is
12 Grace Day. I'm a Staff Attorney at The Door, a
13 comprehensive youth development organization that has
14 been supporting young people in New York City since
15 1972. We offer free access to healthcare and mental
16 health services, housing support, education, meals,
17 and legal assistance, and in 2024 alone our legal
18 services center handled more than 3,300 immigration
19 matters. Many of the young people that we represent
20 are unaccompanied children, and we are a part of the
21 ICARE Coalition and receive funding from the City.
22 As we've been speaking about, you are aware that
23 unaccompanied children enter the U.S. without a
24 parent or legal guardian. These children often
25 qualify for asylum or special visas for abused or

2 abandoned children, but without legal support they
3 may never access the protection they deserve.

4 Shockingly, as I think you know, children have no
5 right to an attorney in Immigration Court to help
6 them plead their case. Of course, young children are
7 unable to understand the complexities of ever-
8 changing immigration law and effectively argue the
9 merits of their cases. Children with representation
10 in Immigration Court are seven times more likely to
11 access immigration relief, and therefore as we fight
12 the uphill battle that the next four years will bring
13 and are currently bringing as we're discussing, we
14 ask for the support of City Council. In the face of a
15 federal administration that is committed to targeting
16 and terrorizing immigrant communities, our city can
17 use our resources to defend these communities and to
18 protect children. ICARE funding for NYC Youth is
19 critically important because it provides essential
20 legal representation for unaccompanied children in
21 New York City who are now sometimes over 18 who are
22 unable to be represented on other federal contracts.
23 Increased funding for ICARE at The Door ensures that
24 we can connect these youth to legal representation
25 but also to our suite of other vital services,

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

224

2 increasing the reach of this funding as we support
3 these youth transitioning to adulthood. By investing
4 into the ICARE Coalition and expanding the support
5 for The Door, City Council can help us protect
6 immigrant youth, promote safety and stability for
7 immigrant communities. Today, I urge City Council
8 to support immigrant youth in the city.

9 Specifically, I echo Sarah and Sierra's request to
10 fully fund the ICARE Coalition for \$6.3 million and
11 increase this funding as we face the terrors that are
12 in our city. Also, I ask for the emergency funding
13 for immigration legal service providers and expanding
14 the support through Welcome NYC and IOI funding.

15 With these supports we can continue defending
16 immigrant youth and offering them the protection and
17 dignity they deserve. Thank you for your time and
18 consideration.

19 MICHELLE SENCION: Good afternoon. My
20 name is Michelle Sencion. I am with Safe Passage
21 Project. I'm a Government Grants Manager. Thank you
22 so much for the Committee on Immigration and Finance
23 for having us testifying today. Safe Passage Project
24 is a nonprofit legal services organization that
25 provides free representation to immigrant children

2 facing deportation. Right now, we represent over
3 1,400 unaccompanied minors across New York City and
4 Long Island. We're a proud member of the ICARE
5 Coalition and our goal is simple, we just want to
6 ensure every unaccompanied immigrant child in New
7 York has access to high-quality legal representation.
8 Most cases take three to six years due to serious
9 backlogs in Immigration Court, USCIS and Family
10 Court. They're legally complex, emotionally
11 intensive, and increasingly unpredictable with
12 shifting federal policies and increased ICE
13 enforcement. Our work is made possible through the
14 City Council support, particularly through the
15 Unaccompanied Minors and Families Initiative, but we
16 are at a breaking point, and I want to highlight some
17 urgent issues. We are very grateful for the
18 Council's ongoing commitment to the ICARE Coalition,
19 but the funding has not changed in over six years,
20 despite inflation, rising caseloads, and increased
21 complexity. Safe Passage Project has requested an
22 increase in ICARE funding without success, and for
23 FY26 we are again respectfully requesting the support
24 of ICARE through funding for \$6.3 million which
25 includes an increase to Safe Passage Project of

2 \$200,000. We are also requesting \$100,000 in
3 discretionary funding for this fiscal year to ensure
4 we can support the increasing number of children
5 impacted by immigration policy changes and
6 enforcement. Our team, including a pipeline of
7 trained attorneys and social workers is ready. We
8 can act immediately to expand services. We would
9 also like to emphasize that while pro se models of
10 immigration services are useful for limited types of
11 relief, they cannot be the beginning and end of wide
12 scale legal services for immigrants in the City. We
13 commend the City's asylum application help centers
14 for assisting thousands in meeting their asylum
15 deadlines, but these centers are not useful to
16 unaccompanied minors. Unaccompanied children are
17 placed through the Office of Refugee Resettlement,
18 and they face challenges in USCIS, EOIR and Family
19 Court. These cases cannot be handled with limited
20 scope. They need dedicated attorneys who can see
21 their cases through to resolution. As mentioned, we
22 were impacted by the termination of the unaccompanied
23 children's program. Our clients have been visited by
24 HSI for wellness checks. These visits are deeply
25 stressful and traumatizing experiences. There are now

2 reports from national partners in Connecticut and
3 neighboring states of caregivers who are immigrants
4 and sponsors of these children being placed-- being
5 detained and placed in their own removal proceedings
6 following those visits. This destabilizes the
7 child's case, and it can shatter their support system
8 that they rely on in the U.S. We are investing more
9 time as an organization and more resources just to
10 keep our clients safe. Additionally, our legal
11 department receives at least one referral per week
12 directly from foster care agencies serving youth in
13 ACS custody for long-term immigration representation.
14 While some of these cases do qualify under ICARE,
15 many don't because they're not in removal
16 proceedings. The cases that fall outside of existing
17 grant scopes are difficult for us to place, and
18 there's no dedicated city funding stream for them.
19 Without one, many children are left unrepresented,
20 not because their case is less urgent but because the
21 system is not accounting for them. We are here today
22 because we are deeply concerned about the lack of
23 funding for youth who fall outside existing grant
24 scopes. We want to highlight the increased absence
25 of-- the absence of an increase for ICARE contracts

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

228

2 despite years of advocacy, and the escalating
3 complexity of our client's legal and personal needs.
4 Without meaningful investment this year, we risk
5 abandoning vulnerable children to navigate an
6 increasingly complex immigration system alone. Thank
7 you for your time and dedication to supporting our
8 work with New York City's immigrant youth.

9 LAUREN MIGLIACCIO: Good afternoon and
10 thank you Chairs Brannan and Avilés. My name is
11 Lauren Migliaccio. I am the Training and Legal
12 Technical Assistance Director of the Immigrant
13 Justice Court which is the first in the nation to
14 place legal fellows at legal service immigration
15 providers. Since my most-esteemed co-panelists today
16 have covered a lot of what I was going to speak about
17 for New York's most vulnerable populations, I would
18 like to first address your opening remarks, Chair
19 Avilés, and put some numbers here that I think could
20 shed a little light on why this is so important. IJC
21 currently has 19 fellows serving this community, but
22 that is funding that is dependent on the Federal
23 Government, and on March 21st, 2025, the Federal
24 Government did terminate that contract, leaving many
25 children, 26,000 exactly, without funding for legal

2 service. There has been a deep impact on the legal
3 service providers here in New York City. Many
4 organizations have looked to layoffs, have paused
5 intakes, and have turned children away for
6 representation. Eliminating federal funding will
7 leave thousands of children without counsel, and
8 specifically here in New York City in Fiscal Year 24,
9 3,475 children were released from the Office of
10 Refugee Resettlement to New York City. That is the
11 number of children that will be facing gaps and
12 instability in legal service representation. The
13 looming federal cuts just leave a gaping hole for no
14 safety net left in these children, and we do urge
15 City Council to take action and ensure that no child-
16 centered representation is left and that every
17 unaccompanied minor will be represented in New York.

18 MARGARET MARTIN: Good afternoon, Chair
19 Avilés, Chair Brannan, Committee Members. Thank you
20 so much for the opportunity to testify today. My
21 name is Margaret Martin. I'm the Co-director of
22 Immigrant and Refugee Services at Catholic Charities
23 Community Services in New York. I'm here today to ask
24 you to continue to advocate for a city funding and
25 awards process that meets the need of nonprofits to

2 operate sustainably and recognizes this moment that
3 we're in of increased and shockingly-aggressive
4 enforcement, including at our New York City
5 Immigration Courts at the same time as the federal
6 administration is ending multiple pathways for
7 immigration status. And Chair Avilés, as you
8 recognized earlier, that has made many of the cases
9 that we do in legal services more complex and more
10 urgent than was true six months ago. Catholic
11 Charities is a member of two IOI coalitions,
12 including IOI CILEC and with the Legal Aid Society as
13 well as the ICARE Coalition. We are also one of the
14 organizations that along with others up here had our
15 funding terminated abruptly by the Federal Government
16 to represent unaccompanied children in March. And I
17 support and agree with the positions in that my
18 fellow panelists have stated with respect to those
19 programs. Catholic Charities is grateful for recent
20 contract notifications from MOIA for renewal of--
21 renewal and a new award of some contracts. So, first
22 of all, we received notification that the HRI,
23 Haitian Response Initiative Legal Services, was
24 renewed as well as their hotline. Unfortunately,
25 those renewal amounts were not increased to keep pace

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

231

2 with our increased expenses. In fact, for both HRI
3 and hotline, we lost ASLAN funding that we were
4 awarded last year to supplement the baseline funding
5 for both HRI and the hotline. That means that we
6 will either need to supplement those programs with
7 other funding or reduce services. For HRI, many of
8 the individuals that we serve through HRI are facing
9 increasingly complex and more urgent cases, and for
10 them to lose our assistance now, for us not to be
11 able to respond to the community need would be
12 extremely unfortunate. So, we ask that you advocate
13 for more funding for that program as well as the
14 hotline where we continue to see more urgent callers,
15 particularly as you noted, with the closing of OASO
16 and the Asylum Application Help Center, we may see
17 more of that in coming months. And then finally,
18 Catholic Charities is a member of the Day Laborer
19 Worker Initiative along with five other providers,
20 and we request an increase to \$4.97 million for
21 Fiscal Year 26 to fund the Day Laborer Workforce
22 Initiative. Thank you so much.

23 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much
24 for all of your testimony and work. I think I'd like
25 to start with a question for you that you noted,

2 losing ASLAN funding. I'm deeply apologetic of not
3 honing it in and asking them exactly where that money
4 was going. I don't think I was going to get an answer
5 anyway, because they don't seem to answer any much--
6 much of anything. But in terms of I guess the
7 reconstructed contracts, like I feel like all we're
8 doing is moving chairs around the deck and calling it
9 something different and wasting a lot of time and
10 resources and aggravation for providers to have to
11 reapply to these new programs and constructs. But I
12 guess you noted renewals of some contracts that have
13 remained flat, but then losing others from the same
14 entities that are going to be deciding and saying
15 there is seemingly more money, I don't know where the
16 more money is.

17 MARGARET MARTIN: I don't think I have an
18 answer to your question, but--

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [interposing] I don't
20 know if I even have a question for you at this point.

21 MARGARET MARTIN: I did want to note, we
22 did get a legal support center award as well,
23 although as we've testified and many others have as
24 well, those awards do not cover the required staffing
25 or deliverables, and we are also-- and this may in

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

233

2 part answer what you were getting at, we are one of
3 the Action NYC providers that was notified that we
4 got a contract, a one-year contract extension. I
5 think that's separate from the ASLAN funding, but I'm
6 not terribly sure.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I guess maybe by a
8 show of hands, how many of you have had conversations
9 with MOIA around the disappearance of the federal
10 contract and got any indication that there is
11 resources to-- for unaccompanied minors in
12 particular? No one. So, the same conversation that
13 MOIA's having with OMB seems to be the same
14 conversation they're having with y'all which is not a
15 whole lot of anything. Because it's clear there's a
16 huge gap here that the City should be feeling really
17 super urgent to begin to address. Maybe it can't do
18 the whole thing, but there should be a plan, and
19 we've received no indication there is no plan, but
20 people are in a lot of conversations with each other
21 apparently.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you for your
23 work and advocacy.

24 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
25 much. Okay, our next panel: Ari Omar Gabon [sp?],

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

234

2 Herold Dasque, Robert Agyemang-- sorry, Robert
3 Agyemang, Aracelis Lucero, Riva Shang, and Madeleine
4 Bravo. Okay, you want to start from the-- my right,
5 your left. Just turn your mic on. Just hit the
6 little button on the bottom.

7 HEROLD DASQUE: Good afternoon, all. my
8 name is Herold Dasque, and I'm here on behalf of
9 Haitian American United for Progress, HAUP, a
10 nonprofit organization that has proudly served New
11 York City immigrants and refugee communities since
12 1975. HAUP's mission is to empower immigrants and
13 refugees by providing the tools and support the need
14 to thrive. We offer a range of essential services
15 including immigration assistance, English as second
16 language instruction, maternal and infant health
17 program. Our work is guided by the principle of
18 equity, access, dignity, helping community members
19 navigate complex system with confidence and respect.
20 One of the greatest challenges facing immigrant New
21 Yorkers today is language access. Without access to
22 skilled interpreters and culturally-competent
23 language services, individuals are often unable to
24 obtain vital resources such as legal aid, healthcare,
25 housing, and education. As our city's immigrant

2 population continues to grow, the need for
3 comprehensive language access services becomes more
4 urgent. The Language Access Coalition representing
5 immigrants from Africa, Asia, Central America, and
6 the Caribbean has proposed the development of
7 language banks and interpreters cooperative. These
8 initiatives are essential to ensuring that all New
9 Yorkers regardless of language can fully access the
10 services they need and deserve. This year marks
11 HAUP's first as a member of the Language Justice
12 Collaboraitve. with support from this initiative
13 we've invested in the language proficiency testing,
14 interpreter and staff training, and program
15 development to strengthen our language access
16 services. These investments have been vital to
17 expanding our capacity and improving service quality.
18 At the same time, HAUP has experienced significant
19 cut in federal, state and city funding due to recent
20 policy changes. These reductions have placed
21 enormous strain our program, just as demand for
22 services continue to rise. Today, we respectfully
23 urge the City Council to restore and expand funding
24 for language access services without [inaudible]
25 investment. Community-based organizations like HAUP

2 will struggle to meet the needs of the people we
3 serve. Language access is not a privilege, it is a
4 fundamental right and a vital public good. I thank
5 you for you time, your leadership and your continued
6 commitment to building a more equitable and inclusive
7 New York City. Thank you.

8 ROBERT AGYEMANG: Good day, Chairman
9 Brannan, Chairperson Avilés. My name is Robert
10 Agyemang. I'm the Vice President of Advocacy through
11 New York Immigration Coalition, a statewide umbrella
12 policy and advocacy organization with over 200
13 members who are immigrant-serving. I wanted to take
14 the time to just thank you for creating a space for
15 immigrant-facing organizations to be able to speak
16 about the Executive Budget. My testimony in total
17 uplifts a ton and a host of different immigrant-
18 related programs and fundings that varies the
19 spectrum that impacts all immigrant New Yorkers, but
20 I wanted to specifically talk about language-- the
21 Language Access Workforce Initiative today,
22 specifically that it still remains a critical need.
23 While working with our dedicated colleagues from HAUP
24 and MASA and African Communities Together, Asian
25 American Federation, we continue to make strides with

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

237

2 regards to the cooperatives, the Language Services
3 Worker Owned Cooperatives, and we want to continue to
4 develop and grow these programs. With respect to the
5 Community Interpreter Bank, we're continuing to forge
6 ahead with its first cohort being of interpreters
7 finalizing their training in mid-June and moving onto
8 potentially medical and legal interpretation
9 certification depending on, you know, if they're able
10 to finish the course, and wanting to acknowledge the
11 work that we have done as well as with our partners,
12 NYCE [sic], La Colmena, Misteca [sic], IARC [sp?],
13 and continuing to broaden the pool of interpreters.
14 I'm finally just wanting to put into the record we
15 are requesting the intentional baselining of funding
16 for \$7.8 million for the whole initiative, the
17 cooperatives, and the community interpreter bank for
18 the continued development, the consistency that's
19 needed for this program to begin to scale for the
20 cooperatives and the bank and just continuing to
21 uplift the need for this Executive Budget to reflect
22 the urgency to deal with the affordability crisis,
23 the looming budget cuts, and the over-criminalization
24 of Black and Brown communities. Thank you.

25

2 ARACELIS LUCERO: Hello, everybody. My
3 name is Aracelis Lucero from MASA. Thank you for the
4 opportunity to testify today. I'm also going to
5 focus on language justice, but also have other
6 nuggets in there that we wanted to plug in. we are
7 an organization that is based in the south Bronx. We
8 partner with immigrant communities from Latin America
9 and indigenous communities living in New York City to
10 strengthen literacy, leadership and power. As our
11 immigrant community and advocates continue to
12 navigate a cruel anti-immigrant political climate
13 that seeks to instill fear and rip families apart, I
14 think we understand the urgency we're facing and the
15 need for continued support. I'm going to start off
16 with just echoing the ask from the New York
17 Immigration Coalition, the \$7.8 million that we're
18 requesting for the continuation of a Community
19 Interpreter Bank, and the funding for the Language
20 Worker-Owned Cooperatives being led by MASA, ACT, and
21 Asian American Federation. We started this project
22 in 2017 and before that with Local Law 30 to focus on
23 ensuring that languages of limited diffusion were
24 also equally able to access interpretation services
25 that were of quality. And this would include

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

239

2 community legal, health and education interpreting as
3 part of this initiative. We currently-- do you guys
4 hear that? Okay, so as part of the initiative, we
5 currently have 127 interpreters in the pipeline, 52
6 of which are currently taking workforce development
7 classes to support their journey towards becoming
8 interpreters. We have approximately 40 interpreters
9 who are going to be trained by the end of June; 27 of
10 those interpreters are English and Spanish. They
11 hail from Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, Dominican
12 Republic, Columbia, Ecuador, and El Salvador, and we
13 have 13 indigenous interpreters who are currently
14 being trained [inaudible] and we have students that
15 speak [inaudible] and Haitian Creole in the pipeline.
16 Twenty-three of our districts have been outreached
17 [sic] and were part of the process, and this summer
18 we intend to continue to train interpreters to do
19 their practice and to pick where they want to
20 specialize. And I talk about all this because it
21 really, really-- like we've gotten this far and it's
22 really important to continue to support this
23 initiative. There's a lot of interest and a lot of
24 people that have the assets of our languages to offer
25 and to provide better services, especially in this

2 need where due process is being violated, and
3 immigrants don't really know what to do. Increase to
4 access in education in the languages that they speak
5 is really important. I also wanted to briefly talk
6 about the Pro Se Plus Project and really focus on the
7 plus part. This is part of the ASLAN network as
8 we're finding out today that most of those providers
9 as part of the project aren't being funded. We have
10 not yet heard, but we did want to share that we have--
11 - part of our funding is funded by MOIA and the other
12 part is privately funded by foundations. The
13 importance of that project is that just like
14 everybody else has spoken about the OASO closing,
15 people need to go somewhere. A lot of those people
16 are coming to all of these organizations. Some of
17 the work that we're focusing on is how to do trial
18 preparation for them, what to expect, how to be able
19 to fight their case. We heard how overwhelmed
20 lawyers are, and so, part of this work is to continue
21 to support the people who are or who have to navigate
22 the process pro se, you know, gives them a little bit
23 more of an opportunity. We continue to develop
24 educational resources so that they're accessible to a
25 larger community. And part of that project also

2 includes ensuring that there's translation
3 interpretation services. How this all fits is that
4 [inaudible] lingual and our nonprofits are also being
5 tapped into to do that work, and we've provided
6 interpretation services for people going to their
7 asylum interviews, trying to go to the court and
8 we're getting increased requests, and so there's an
9 urgency to continue to move the interpreters that we
10 currently have through the pipeline and to specialize
11 them, and we can't do that without the continued
12 funding. So, it'd be really sad to see that just be
13 cut abruptly. We're also here to advocate for the
14 Rapid Response Network, and NYFUP. And last, I'll
15 just plug in two more initiatives, the Adult Literacy
16 Initiative. We need to continue to provide
17 opportunities for our community to be able to
18 progress and to move into workforce development
19 regardless of where they're-- there's a lot of fear,
20 but they still deserve an opportunity to go learn and
21 to live their lives, you know, and to better
22 themselves. And last but not least, I do want to call
23 for increased funding for the Communication
24 Initiative with the New York Public School system.
25 Right now it's at \$3 million. we're asking it to be

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

242

2 increased for \$7 million, and again, that additional
3 \$3 million is to go towards meeting the growing need
4 for translation interpretation services in the school
5 system which as we see is being impacted and it's a
6 prime place for community members to get information.
7 Thank you for your time.

8 RIVA SHANG: Thank you, Chair Brannan and
9 Chair Aviles and the Committees on Finance and
10 Immigration. My name Riva Shang. I'm the Economic
11 Empowerment Community Organizer at the Asian American
12 Federation where we represent a collective of 70+
13 member nonprofit organizations serving 1.5 million
14 Asian New Yorkers. At AAF we believe that we should
15 welcome all immigrants with fairness and dignity.
16 Asian New Yorkers are the fastest-growing demographic
17 in the city, making up over 17 percent or one in six
18 of the population. AAF's Rapid Immigrant Support and
19 Empowerment, or RISE, initiative is facilitating new
20 immigrants' access to critical services and
21 supporting the nonprofits that deliver them. But
22 today I'm going to focus on one important prong of
23 our immigrant support programs, improving language
24 access. Asian Americans have the highest rates of
25 limited English language proficiency in the City at

2 44 percent, meaning nearly one in two Asian New
3 Yorkers face language barriers that limit their
4 access to government services, employment, education,
5 and civic participation. As part of this work, AAF
6 is a proud member of the Language Justice
7 Collaborative, along with African Communities
8 Together, MASA, NYIC, HAUP, and IARC [sic] which in
9 2017 helped pass Local Law 30 requiring New York City
10 agencies to implement language access plans. The
11 implementation of that law has seen agencies rely on
12 poor quality machine translations that at times turn
13 out nonsense translations and on unreliable third-
14 party teleservices like Language Line. In Fiscal
15 Year 25, City Council allocated \$3.8 million that
16 allowed us as a coalition to develop worker
17 cooperatives of translators and interpreters as well
18 as the Community Interpreter Bank. Using this year's
19 funding, AAF worked with our member organizations to
20 recruit community members to serve as Asian language
21 interpreters. We received over 160 applications, and
22 through rounds of screening, we are now working with
23 a group of 16 immigrants who are fluent in the top
24 Asian languages in New York City, Arabic, Bengali,
25 Chinese, both Cantonese and Mandarin, Korean, and

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

244

2 Urdu, who are training as community interpreters and
3 will go on to build a worker-owned cooperative.
4 These interpreters alongside translators from other
5 immigrant communities served by LJC will be poised to
6 fill the critical need for high-quality
7 interpretation for NYC area government nonprofits,
8 schools, hospitals, and the private sector while also
9 providing opportunities for income and business
10 ownership for the same immigrant communities that
11 need them. The funding that we're requesting from
12 Council would allow us to continue building the
13 cooperative with our trainees who will begin
14 providing services within FY26 and launch fully by
15 the start of FY27. We applaud the Council support
16 this year and urge you to again support funding for
17 this initiative in FY26 budget to ensure continuity
18 for these programs that are already in progress.
19 Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and
20 more information on our immigrant rapid response
21 programming can be found in our written testimony.

22 MADELEINE BRAVO: Good afternoon, Chairs
23 and Council Members. My name is Madeleine Bravo and
24 I am the Legal Services Coordinator at La Colmena.
25 We are a immigrants rights organization based in

2 Staten Island, and our mission to empower the
3 immigrant community through education, culture,
4 organizing, and economic development. For years, La
5 Colmena has stood unapologetically with our immigrant
6 community, often facing hostility and resistance.
7 However, we always remain dedicated because we know
8 how critical this work is. We've built a sanctuary
9 of support, resilience and empowerment, but we cannot
10 do it alone. Today, I am here to remind you of the
11 vital importance of ensuring that La Colmena
12 continues to receive the unwavering support it needs
13 from this council, now more than ever. As we
14 navigate a fast-changing policy environment, we have
15 been equipping our community members with tools to
16 navigate ICE interactions and preparing them with the
17 power of attorney in case of deportation proceeding.
18 But this is just the beginning. Our immigrant
19 neighbors face not only the threat of deportation,
20 but also wage theft, discrimination, and harassment.
21 This is why we ask to please include us along with
22 our partners and the Day Laborer Coalition and the
23 New York City Coalition for Domestic Workers so we
24 can continue doing this important work. We've also
25 had to ramp up security at our own facility as we

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

246

2 face opposition from those who disagree with the work
3 we do on Staten Island. It is not easy to operate
4 under these conditions, but we refuse to back down.
5 This is why La Colmena exists, to remind every
6 immigrant on Staten Island that they are not alone.
7 We are here to fight for them, stand with them, and
8 uplift them. However, to continue this critical
9 mission, we need your partnership and your commitment
10 in supporting La Colmena. Thank you for your time,
11 your support, and for standing with us as we continue
12 this fight for justice and dignity for all. Together
13 we can build a strong and more inclusive Staten
14 Island. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
16 much for all you do. Okay, our next panel we have
17 Louis Cortez [sp?], Armary Perez, Jose Quebrado
18 [sp?], Julissa Morocco [sp?], Alejandro Grajales,
19 Mamadou Balde [sp?], and Jose Yos [sp?]. Oh, you have
20 testimony, okay. Okay, so you want to begin from the
21 right, from the left?

22 JOSE QUEBRADO: [speaking Spanish]

23 TRANSLATOR: Good morning all the members
24 of the Committee. My name Jose Quebrado. I am
25 Mexican and I've lived in the United States for more

2 than 34 years. I've worked all my life in this city
3 in restaurants and also doing deliveries. For more
4 than 20 years I worked at a bakery in Manhattan in
5 shifts more than 12 hours a day without any rest,
6 doing everything, cleaning bathrooms, and cleaning
7 basements, even preparing the ingredients, operating
8 stoves, and more. They never paid me extra hours and
9 they didn't respect my rights. They didn't even pay
10 me the minimum salary.

11 JOSE QUEBRADO: [speaking Spanish]

12 TRANSLATOR: More than five years ago I
13 made the complaint with the Labor Department and I'm
14 still waiting for an answer, but thanks to Labor
15 Justice Project, I was able to apply to the program,
16 Deferred Action for Workers, and today I have a
17 temporary protection and a social security number. It
18 is a relief, but the fight hasn't ended.

19 JOSE QUEBRADO: [speaking Spanish]

20 TRANSLATOR: Besides that, I am one of
21 the many people affected by the 9/11 attacks. Since
22 then I suffered from respiratory problems that are
23 very severe and also mental health problems. I have
24 been admitted in several hospitals in order to use a
25 device to be able to breathe, and in spite of all of

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

248

2 this, they told me that I don't qualify for
3 compensation because I don't have cancer, even if my
4 health deteriorated after that day.

5 JOSE QUEBRADO: [speaking Spanish]

6 TRANSLATOR: I am here today to tell you
7 that workers like me, we all deserve justice and
8 access to real resources, that organizations like
9 Labor Justice Project are essential because they
10 accompany us when nobody else does. They help us
11 raise our voice and defend our rights and not to feel
12 alone.

13 JOSE QUEBRADO: [speaking Spanish]

14 TRANSLATOR: I ask you to please
15 guarantee the financial support that's necessary for
16 this organization to continue accompanying thousands
17 of immigrant workers like me. We're not asking for
18 charity. We're asking for justice.

19 JOSE QUEBRADO: [speaking Spanish]

20 TRANSLATOR: Thank you for listening to
21 me, and thank you for believing in a future where we
22 all can live and work with dignity. Thanks.

23 NATALIE: [speaking Spanish]

24 TRANSLATOR: Good afternoon. My name is-
25 - oh, good afternoon, Council Member Alexa Avilés and

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

249

2 everyone in this committee. My name is Natalie and
3 I'm going to read the testimony of Rodolfo Pardalla
4 [sp?], and thanks for the opportunity to testify.

5 NATALIE: [speaking Spanish]

6 TRANSLATOR: My name is Rodolfo Pardalla.
7 I come from Columbia and I'm a proud member of Labor
8 Justice Project. I came to this country two years ago
9 with a hope of finding stability, opportunities, and
10 a dignified life for my family, but instead, I found
11 a reality of exploitation and abuse.

12 NATALIE: [speaking Spanish]

13 TRANSLATOR: I worked at a construction
14 company called Dynamo Construction where I suffered
15 discrimination, insults and humiliations for being
16 Latin American. They would call us dogs, lazy, and
17 they even told us that they wish they deported us all
18 Latins. They denied us water. We didn't have time
19 to eat, and we worked long journeys [sic] without
20 payment or extra hours, and the worst, that they
21 never paid me what was corresponded [sic] to me.

22 NATALIE: [speaking Spanish]

23 TRANSLATOR: Thanks to the Project--
24 sorry. When I denounced the wage theft with the
25 State Labor Department, my boss started harassing me.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

250

2 He called me continually to pressure me to remove the
3 complaint and he threatened me through my son, and he
4 sent my data to ICE asking me to be deported. I made
5 the complaint with the police and I have proof of
6 everything.

7 NATALIE: [speaking Spanish]

8 TRANSLATOR: And thanks to the Labor
9 Project, Labor Justice Project, I didn't face this
10 alone. They helped me get organized, denounced, and
11 recovered my voice. And thanks to your support, the
12 Department of Labor is considering certifying my case
13 for a U-Visa, but that was not a favor. It's a right
14 that I earned with fight and organization.

15 NATALIE: [speaking Spanish]

16 TRANSLATOR: and that's why I'm here
17 today, to ask you to please allocate the funds for
18 the budget so that Labor Justice Project can continue
19 existing and helping thousands of people like me.
20 Every time that a worker is threatened by
21 immigration, that organization is there firm
22 accompanying us and defending us.

23 NATALIE: [speaking Spanish]

24

25

2 TRANSLATOR: Without them-- with them--
3 sorry. Without them, we're alone, but with them we
4 have power.

5 NATALIE: [speaking Spanish]

6 TRANSLATOR: Thank you for listening to
7 our stories and for considering our call and for
8 justice and funding. Thanks.

9 MAMADOU BALDE: Good afternoon, members
10 of City Council. My name is Mamadou Balde [sp?], and
11 I am a proud delivery worker here in New York. I have
12 been riding since last year, rain and shine, to make
13 sure people get their meal and medicine, often
14 putting my own safety at risk. But now, instead of
15 being recognized and protected, I feel targeted. In
16 the past few weeks I've been seeing dozen of fellow
17 delivery worker, many of them immigrant like me,
18 receive a criminal summons just for doing their job.
19 They are not violent crime. They are a ticket for
20 riding e-bikes often because we don't know the exact
21 rule, or because we simply cannot afford to say no
22 the short time the app company give us deliver the
23 food. These tickets cost us time, money, in some
24 cases affecting our ability to stay in this country.
25 We're not criminal. We're workers. We don't need

2 more policy. What we really need is education, safe
3 [inaudible], and access to the tools that allow us to
4 do our job safely and legally. Right now, an
5 extremely difficult for many of us to even find
6 certified e-bike that meet the city standards, and
7 the cost is out of reach. We ride six to 10 hours a
8 day, but we don't have places to rest, to charge our
9 batteries, or even to use bathroom. That's why the
10 delivery hub is so important. It's a space designed
11 with our safety and dignity in mind. The Worker
12 Justice Project has proposed a [inaudible] plan to
13 invest thousand, 100,000 safety education, case
14 management and support for the implementation of the
15 deliverista hub. Please, don't use the city budget
16 to criminalize us. Use it to educate us. Use it to
17 support us. Use it to make the city safer for
18 everyone, riders and pedestrians alike. We are not
19 asking much-- for much. We are just asking to be
20 treated with fairness, dignity, and respect that
21 every essential worker deserve. Thank you for your
22 time and for listening to those of us who keep the
23 city moving. Thank you.

24 ALEJANDRO GRAJALES: [speaking Spanish]

2 TRANSLATOR: Good afternoon. My name is
3 Alejandro Grajales. I'm a delivery worker and an
4 organizer with the Workers Justice Project where I
5 lead the work on wage theft and labor abuse. Today,
6 we heard the testimonies of three immigrant workers
7 who bravely share their experiences, extreme work
8 hours, threats, stolen wages, illness, and fear, but
9 we also heard something else. Thanks to the support
10 of the Worker's Justice Project, they are now
11 standing tall, organized, and fighting for justice.

12 ALEJANDRO GRAJALES: [speaking Spanish]

13 TRANSLATOR: Julissa who couldn't speak
14 today, but has a message for us, reports an abusive
15 employer and received deferred action just like over
16 100 other workers. Rodolfo is working with the
17 Department of Labor on a retaliation case and is
18 waiting for certification for a U-Visa, and Jose who
19 after more than three decades in this country and
20 being affected by 9/11 finally has immigration
21 protections. None of these achievements would have
22 been possible without the relentless support and work
23 of our organization.

24 ALEJANDRO GRAJALES: [speaking Spanish]

2 TRANSLATOR: I speak not only as an
3 organizer, I also speak as a worker. I know what it's
4 like to work in the rain, in the cold, or under fear
5 or fear of being robbed, getting into an accident,
6 being unfairly deactivated, or not making it home.
7 That's why I'm here, because we know this fight is
8 collective and goes beyond ourselves.

9 ALEJANDRO GRAJALES: [speaking Spanish]

10 TRANSLATOR: That's why I urgently ask
11 you today, secure the necessary funding for the
12 Worker's Justice Program to continue operating and
13 growing. We need your support to sustain these four
14 essential programs: \$100,000 for safety education and
15 training program for delivery workers, \$250,000 for
16 support for low-income workers, \$95,000 for worker
17 cooperative development initiative, \$150,000 for
18 support initiative for women and immigrant workers.

19 ALEJANDRO GRAJALES: [speaking Spanish]

20 TRANSLATOR: Without these resources we
21 won't be able to continue supporting the most
22 vulnerable workers of our city. Today, we face
23 enormous challenges, labor abuse, racism, violence,
24 and misinformation. It is precisely in times like
25 these when we most need your support, because when a

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

255

2 worker recovers stolen wages or a delivery worker
3 learns that they have rights, it's not just one
4 person who wins, it's the whole city. Thank you very
5 much.

6 ARMARY PEREZ: Good afternoon, Chair
7 Avilés and members of the Committee. My name is
8 Armary Perez and I'm a Program Director of Workers
9 Justice Project. I'm honored to speak today on
10 behalf of WJP members who are delivery workers, day
11 laborers and domestic workers, people who work, keep
12 this city alive every single day. I've seen firsthand
13 the struggles our members face, stolen wage, unsafe
14 jobs, and now something even more frightening, they
15 are being criminalized by the NYPD just for doing
16 their jobs. These essential workers risk their
17 health and safety to give New Yorkers feed [sic] and
18 cared for, but instead of protection they live in
19 daily fear, fear of immigration raids at court, at
20 work, even in their own neighborhoods. This fear is
21 real, and it tears family apart. At Workers Justice
22 Project, we stand alongside our members. We help
23 them secure fair wage, fair working conditions and
24 dignity. We work with city agencies to provide the
25 services they desperately need, but now, under the

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

256

2 NYPD and NYC Mayor Adams' policy, delivery workers
3 are being targeted with criminal summonses, thrown
4 into a confusing criminal system with little to no
5 support. It's heartbreaking [inaudible]. For five
6 years we have received no new funding even as demand
7 grows. We have stretched every dollars to the limit
8 doing everything we can to support newly-arrived
9 immigrants and delivery workers, but their needs are
10 overwhelming. And without new resources we cannot
11 protect this community. Today, I ask you to stand
12 with us, support these vital programs that mean the
13 world to our members. \$200,000 for protect NYC
14 immigrant families, helping immigrant workers fight
15 back against enforcement; \$100,000 for citywide
16 deliverista average--

17 [gavel]

18 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing] Hang
19 on. Hang on.

20 ARMARY PEREZ: and safety training.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Hang on. Need to
22 get quiet in the chamber, please, while people are
23 testifying. Thank you.

24 ARMARY PEREZ: Thank you. \$4,907,000 for
25 the Day Laborer Workforce Initiative Coalition that

2 supports every single worker in the day labor
3 centers, connecting workers with living wage jobs and
4 trainings; \$150,000 for OSHA [inaudible] construction
5 safety trainings ensuring immigrant workers can work
6 safety; and \$10,000 in discretionary funding
7 supporting every from job training to healthcare
8 access. These dollars represents more than problems
9 [sic]. They represent hope, dignity, and the chance
10 for better life for thousand of workers who make this
11 city run. Together we can build a new New York, and
12 this values-- protects all the city and all our
13 workers. Thank you for listening and for your
14 support.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
16 much. Thank you. Okay, next we have Nilbia Coyote.

17 NILBIA COYOTE: Thank you. Good
18 afternoon, Chair Avilés, Chair Brannan, and members
19 of the City Council Immigration and Finance
20 Committees and fellow New Yorkers. My name is Nilbia
21 Coyote. I'm the Executive Director of NICE, New
22 Immigrant Community Empowerment, a community-based
23 organization in Queens that is dedicated to nurturing
24 the spirt of all immigrants and supporting the power
25 and potential of immigrant workers, new New Yorkers

2 and longstanding members of our city who are too
3 often left behind. I am here today to speak about
4 the essential role of our Pre-Apprenticeship for Life
5 and Work Program and to urge the City to continue
6 [inaudible] it's commitment to organizations like
7 NICE through stable and timely contract funding,
8 particularly the Workforce Development Initiative
9 such as the Day Laborer Workforce Initiative,
10 Immigrant Gender Equity, Construction Site Safety
11 Initiative, Adult Literacy Pilot Project, Welcome
12 NYC, and legal services such as low-wage worker
13 support among many others. Our Pre-Apprenticeship
14 for Life and Work provides immigrant New Yorkers with
15 what they need most, real access to opportunity. We
16 prepare individuals, most of them low-wage workers
17 and often excluded from traditional welfare systems,
18 for union apprenticeship, skill certifications, and
19 career pathways in growing industries like
20 construction, green jobs and building maintenance.
21 We do these in a culturally-responsive,
22 linguistically-appropriate, and worker-centered way.
23 But this program is not just about skills, it's about
24 dignity, mobility, and survival. Every week I meet
25 with participants who are navigating multiple

2 barriers, language, immigration status, lack of
3 health services, [inaudible] discrimination and
4 economic hardship. They are newly-arrived
5 immigrants, day laborers, domestic workers, and job
6 seekers, people who keep the city running, but who
7 are constantly fighting to stay afloat. Because
8 beyond job training we equip our participants with
9 critical life skills that are essential for surviving
10 and thriving in the city. These are the things that
11 we don't talk about, yet they determine whether a
12 person can fully participate in society:
13 understanding how to navigate the transportation
14 system, access health services and insurance, manage
15 finances, and open a bank account, etcetera. In
16 addition to workforce and life skill development,
17 NICE provides critical legal education and support
18 services to help our community members navigate an
19 increasingly hostile environment. Every day we offer
20 Know Your Rights Workshops to ensure immigrants
21 understand the protection under labor, immigration,
22 and criminal justice systems. These sessions are not
23 [inaudible], they are tools for survival. Whether
24 it's a worker facing wage theft or someone targeted
25 by immigration enforcement, our legal empowerment

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

260

2 work helps them recognize abuse, assert their rights,
3 and access support. In this moment when immigrant
4 communities are under extreme harm, these legal
5 services are essential to protect lives, prevent
6 exploitation, and build collective power. For them,
7 NICE is a lifeline and the Pre-Apprenticeship for
8 Life and Work is often the first step toward a more
9 stable future. We are deeply proud of the impact of
10 our program; however, I must be honest, our ability
11 to continue delivering these results under threat.
12 We call on the City Council to ensure full and
13 continued funding for immigrant service workforce
14 programs, language access, welcoming new immigrants,
15 legal services, health services, etcetera. In total,
16 over \$1 million for NICE and different awards.
17 Expedite reimbursements and budget approvals so that
18 nonprofits are not forced to carry the cost of city
19 services, and center immigrant and worker-led
20 organizations in the design and funding of workforce
21 development initiatives, particularly those that
22 serve undocumented and low-income New Yorkers. on
23 behalf of NICE and the immigrant workers we serve, I
24 thank you for your time and your leadership. Gracias.

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

261

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you for your
3 testimony. Okay, now we have Paulina Cohen, Scarlett
4 Thompson, Paula Inargu [sp?], Natalia from Make the
5 Road, Timothy Sheehan, Julian Colon, and Jimin Wu Li.
6 [inaudible] Okay, so hang back and we'll call you up
7 together.

8 NATALIA ARISTIZABAL: Good afternoon to
9 Chair Avilés and all the Council Members present. My
10 name is Natalia Aristizabal and I'm testifying-- and
11 I'm Deputy Director of Make the Road New York, and
12 I'm testifying on behalf of our 28,000+ members. My
13 written testimony is longer, and I actually was going
14 to start with some of the work that we're doing, but
15 I want to start our verbal testimony talking
16 specifically about the student Dylan who was picked
17 up in the Bronx, and it's important to highlight this
18 case, because Dylan did not have any criminal record.
19 He did the process for asylum at the border, and he
20 is-- or he was in the current process, and he decided
21 with his lawyer that he should show up to his
22 immigration case. What we saw in Dylan's case is two
23 things, a practice that we're seeing now from
24 Immigration where they're dismissed in an immigration
25 case so that ICE can pick up the person outside, and

2 a lot of these people actually get represented by the
3 Rapid Response Initiative which currently this year
4 we're asking for \$25 million for legal
5 representation, including a restoration of \$600,000
6 that was taken away last year, and I'm highlight this
7 because these cases, we're seeing them more and more
8 where ICE just only wants to pick up people who are
9 brown and it doesn't matter what immigration case
10 people have. And it's really unfortunate to see a
11 student get picked up. And both the DOE and the
12 Mayor's Office Immigrant Affairs should be doing more
13 to help in his case. We additional also want to
14 baseline the current funding of \$1.6 million. we
15 want to invest \$55 million in immigration legal
16 services to expand access to representation and
17 increase and baseline \$40 million for the Immigrant
18 Opportunity Initiative, and renew the Protect New
19 York Families Initiative to support immigrant New
20 Yorkers. Additionally, we're asking to fully fund
21 the fund the Department of Consumer and Worker
22 Protections at \$2.5 million for worker's rights
23 enforcement to ensure that the new minimum pay rule
24 for delivery workers and more. We expand the low
25 wage worker support initiative to \$3 million so we

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

263

2 can help immigrant workers fight stolen wages and
3 learn their rights and restore the Commission on
4 Human Rights. I want to highlight just two quickly
5 education programs. We want to make sure that there
6 is double baseline funding for DYCD funding adult
7 literacy programs from \$12 to \$24 million to maintain
8 adult literacy discretionary funding at \$16.5
9 million, including the Adult Literacy pilot, and we
10 want to-- we're grateful that \$14 million was
11 included in the Executive Budget for community
12 schools. We still need \$3.3 million for Student
13 Success Centers, \$12 million for Restorative Justice,
14 and last but not least, we can stop using some of the
15 money to have safety agents or NYPD in schools since
16 students don't feel safe anymore with NYPD in their
17 schools. Thank you.

18 PAULINA COHEN: Good afternoon, everyone.
19 It's good to see some of you from the preliminary
20 hearing, and I know it's been a long day of
21 testimony, so I appreciate your commitment. I'm
22 Paulina Cohen. I'm a Staff Attorney at the New York
23 City Anti-Violence Project. You heard from a lot of
24 great legal service providers that are doing a lot of
25 great immigration work, but I'm here to talk about

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

264

2 AVP which has long been at the forefront of New
3 York's fight against hate and oppression. Our crisis
4 hotline is open 24 hours a day, and we offer critical
5 support to LGBTQ and immigrant communities, including
6 clients in all of your districts. So I want to thank
7 you for your ongoing support. It's becoming harder
8 for LGBTQ and immigrant New Yorkers to access justice
9 an safety, and there's no guarantee of legal
10 representation in the immigration system which leaves
11 thousands to face serious legal and human rights
12 challenges all alone. We at AVP, however, are
13 committed to serving the most vulnerable, and we
14 recognize the Council's commitment to protecting
15 immigrants. We recently filed an amicus brief
16 supporting your lawsuit against the Mayor's Office
17 for allowing ICE at Rikers, and I'm here to ask you
18 to help complete this puzzle by ensuring sustained
19 and increased funding for immigration legal services.
20 AVP is the only LGBTQ-specific victim services agency
21 in the City. We provide culturally-competent legal
22 services including humanitarian immigration relief
23 alongside holistic support. We do outreach to ensure
24 survivors know about and can access our services, and
25 we advocate on a broader scale, like by filing the

2 amicus in your case, to lift up the issues our
3 clients face. I want to tell you quickly about one of
4 my clients. I'm going to call her Daisy. Daisy came
5 to us with a really complex immigration case. Her
6 case had been bouncing between the immigration
7 agencies and Immigration Courts and she didn't have a
8 clear grasp on the status of her application with
9 ambiguity leaving her vulnerable to wrongful
10 apprehension by immigration authorities. We
11 intervened, filed the right motions, got her asylum
12 application properly filed, and she was also able to
13 finally get her work permit which was years overdue.
14 Thanks to AVP's continued support, Daisy now has
15 clear legal status and the ability to work which
16 allows her to continue the positive life she's
17 building here in New York. Daisy is just one of
18 many. In Fiscal Year 24, AVP's Legal Department
19 handled over 280 cases, nearly 70 percent immigration
20 related. This need is growing, especially among our
21 transgender clients who have been specifically
22 targeted by hateful federal policies. We fill
23 critical service gaps where the city resources fall
24 short, and our colocation model connects legal and
25 social services, helping survivors holistically

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

266

2 rebuild their lives. With your support, we can expand
3 that work, especially in light of cuts to our federal
4 funding. Funding from you all will allow us to
5 provide direct services, outreach, and advocacy that
6 are all really essential in this acute moment of
7 crisis. Simply put, without your help, we cannot
8 continue to keep our communities safe. AVP is
9 committed to ensuring that our community members have
10 access to justice and safety, and I'm asking this
11 committee to show that same dedication. Thank you
12 for your ongoing support and for the opportunity to
13 testify.

14 JULIAN COLON: Good afternoon, Chair
15 Avilés and distinguished members of the New York City
16 Council Committee. My name is Julian Colon and I'm a
17 Literacy Program Coordinator and an ESOL teacher at
18 the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park, also known
19 as CFL. I'm here today to call on City Council to
20 maintain the full amount of \$16.5 million of
21 discretionary funding for adult literacy initiative
22 and adult literacy pilot project. Over the past four
23 years, serving the immigrant community of New York
24 City has been an honor and a privilege. I've been
25 fortunate enough to have the hardest working, most

2 dedicated students in my classroom. Whether to
3 pursue new professional ventures, return to school
4 and complete a degree, prepare for the citizenship
5 exam, or simply develop better communication skills
6 to connect with their children, the individuals who
7 have gathered at CFL all arrive with a drive and
8 sense of perseverance that is nothing short of
9 inspiring. Eager to learn and share their culture and
10 experiences, these students continue to inspire me on
11 a daily basis and inform my teaching. They remind me
12 every day why I do what I do, and that it is never too
13 late to pursue your dreams regardless of who you are
14 or where you come from. We're truly grateful that
15 the New York City Council provided us with the
16 necessary resources to rescue our ESOL program after
17 a 24 percent reduction of DYCD's Adult Literacy
18 Program from their previous procurement. As Sunset
19 Park has the third highest concentration of
20 individuals with limited English language proficiency
21 in New York City, your support has allowed me to
22 continue classes in our high-need area. This need
23 hasn't gone away. We estimate that our ESOL waiting
24 list is in the thousands and interest has remained
25 steady, even in the face of xenophobic federal

2 policies. Thank you for partnering with us in this
3 fight to protect adult education classes such as mine
4 that take place across the City each day, that
5 enrich, educate, and nurture those seeking a better
6 life in the United States. Those of us within the
7 field of language education, particularly within the
8 nonprofit sector, view language education not as a
9 commodity, but as an essential service that should be
10 available to all. With your efforts, we can continue
11 to provide these services to those who need them the
12 most who would otherwise not have access to such
13 resources nor the opportunity to realize their full
14 potential. Thank you.

15 TIM SHEEHAN: Good afternoon, Chair
16 Avilés and Chair Brannan, and distinguished members
17 of the Council Committees. I'm Tim Sheehan, and I'm
18 Chair of the Board of the Center for Family Life in
19 Sunset Park, and I'm joining Julian here today and
20 others to urge the City Council to protect our
21 immigrant community by maintaining the full \$16.5
22 million in discretionary funding for the Adult
23 Literacy Initiative and the Adult Literacy Pilot
24 Project. Through discretionary funding, our ESOL
25 program offered at no cost enables New Yorkers with

2 limited English proficiency to begin their journey
3 toward dignified working conditions, improved pay,
4 increased access to public benefits, and a greater
5 sense of belonging our neighborhood. A Worthy
6 Investment, a recent report from the United
7 Neighborhood Houses, highlights the positive impact,
8 economic and social impacts, of investment in our
9 community members through adult literacy programs.
10 For example, the first randomized evaluation of the
11 publicly funded ESOL course in Massachusetts
12 published in the Journal of Economic Policy found
13 that those who participated increased annual earnings
14 by 56 percent. In Sunset Park this is seen through
15 the story of Raul, a student at CFL, with an
16 unwavering commitment to learning who day after day
17 took risks, learned skills and gained confidence in
18 his abilities to communicate in English. Through his
19 own initiative our classes propelled him to prepare
20 for and enroll in community college where he's now
21 pursuing his passion for chemistry with the goal of
22 becoming a pharmacist. With support of the City
23 Council in FY25, 75 percent of our program
24 participants showed improvement in their English
25 proficiency leading to outcomes like Raul's that can

2 support working families and strengthen our
3 community. But I want to say that these benefits go
4 beyond the individual. The economic and social
5 benefits of ESOL programs re-down [sic] to the City's
6 economy and to the City's fiscal-- to the City's
7 fisc. I'm glad that Chairman Brannan is here to hear
8 this. So, in the Massachusetts study they found that
9 the increase in earnings over time is 56 percent of
10 the individual's increase in earnings over time paid
11 for the cost of the program and actually generated a
12 six percent return to taxpayers. And earlier study
13 called Eager for English, a report that was prepared
14 by a firm Appleseed for the New York Immigration
15 Coalition in 2004, shows that increasing the supply
16 of ESOL classes in New York City would more than pay
17 for itself by increasing the skill level of program
18 participants, thereby their total economic impact, it
19 would provide a net increase to New York City and New
20 York State taxes. So, these programs beyond their
21 social benefits could be looked on as economic
22 development programs and probably have a bigger bang
23 for the buck than any other economic development
24 program you might consider. So, ideally our ESOL
25 program would be supported by a robust baseline

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

271

2 budget managed by DYCD with stable year-over-year
3 funding. However, until DYCD revises its policies,
4 it is crucial that the New York City Council
5 continues its support to ensure that adult learners
6 continue to have access to the pathways they need to
7 thrive. Thank you very much for your consideration.

8 JIMIN WU LI: Good afternoon. Thank you
9 to Chair Avilés, Chair Brannan and members of the
10 Immigration and Finance Committee for the opportunity
11 to testify. My name is Jimin Wu Li and I'm a student
12 from the [inaudible] High School as part of the Youth
13 Advocate Team at the Chinese-American Planning
14 Council. When I first arrived in America, I was very
15 afraid to admit from that I was from Venezuela.
16 There was a pervasive discrimination towards people
17 like me, and I grew up being bullied. I was afraid
18 that if anyone knew who or where I came from they
19 looked at me differently and reject me. When I came
20 in touch with CPC, I slowly found my own values and
21 was accepted into this community. I attained
22 opportunities and achieved things that I never
23 thought I would be able to accomplish. I was able to
24 get my first job as a supervisor where I was able to
25 oversee and manage more than 30 workers. In this

2 community and through these experience that CPC has
3 offered me, I learned to truly appreciate who I am
4 and where-- and here proudly tell you where I came
5 from. In light of federal threats, our city must
6 live up to its values and adopt a budget that meets
7 the growing needs of working class and immigrant New
8 Yorkers. We need to fully fund the social safety net
9 which includes the service and programming provided
10 by organizations like CPC. We're also urging to
11 expand access to support services such as housing
12 vouchers to all New Yorkers regardless of immigration
13 status through increased investment and Promise NYC,
14 and allocate additional funds for adult literacy to
15 meet the needs of our newest New Yorkers.
16 investments such as these will enable all families to
17 improve their economic prospect more fully integrate
18 into their communities and thrive. Thank you so much
19 for the opportunity to testify on issues that really
20 impact our communities.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much
22 obviously to this entire panel, and I have to give a
23 special shout out to my CFL and CPC colleagues,
24 [inaudible] all of y'all. I just wanted to
25 underscore-- thank you for pointing out obviously the

2 probably very minimum return of investment that we
3 get from adult literacy. It is confounding to me
4 that our city has not seen the multiplication benefit
5 of this service for so long and has been like
6 defunding it for so long. So, we're going to
7 continue to fight to expand literacy funding because
8 it is absolutely critical to our organizations, to
9 our communities, to our city. So, thank you so much.

10 TIM SHEEHAN: Thank you for your
11 continued support.

12 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
13 much. Okay, next panel we have Zachary Katznelson,
14 Megan French-Marcelin, Sarita Daftary, Jennifer
15 Parish, Roberto Ponce [sp?]. What? Want to begin
16 from your left?

17 ZACHARY KATZNELSON: Sure. Thank you so
18 much. Good afternoon. I'm Zachary Katznelson. I'm the
19 Executive Director of the Independent Rikers
20 Commission. Thank you for the chance to testify
21 today. I want to first thank the Council for its
22 continued support and push for the investments that
23 discussed in its press release this morning,
24 investments to address mental illness, to address
25 recidivism and re-entry, investments that are

2 critical to public safety, to closing Rikers, and to
3 ultimately saving this city money. They are pennies
4 on the dollar compared to Rikers, but the return will
5 be tremendous as opposed to Rikers itself, which it's
6 hard to imagine a worst investment this city can
7 make, they continue to pour money into Rikers Island.
8 I want to touch on two things based on the Department
9 of Corrections testimony today. Department of
10 Corrections said it had-- that the State Commission
11 on Correction has done a staffing analysis of one
12 jail on Rikers. There are eight open jails on
13 Rikers. So, what would happen if the State
14 Commission or somebody else actually analyzed the
15 staffing at all eight jails on Rikers Island? What
16 would that budget look like as compared to what we
17 have today? You know, notably, when the DOC said the
18 State Commission looked at the Bellevue outposted
19 units, it found that many fewer officers were needed
20 than the Department of Corrections said. So, the
21 Council could require the Department of Correction to
22 do a department-wide analysis, both civilian and
23 uniformed staff, and then produce a budget that
24 actually matches the true need, whatever that turns
25 out to be. Secondly, re-entry. You know, time and

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

275

2 again we hear about people who are released from
3 Rikers, people who are getting treatment inside,
4 mental health or addiction treatment, who are not
5 properly connected with service providers on the
6 outside. That is missed opportunity after missed
7 opportunity. It's no wonder that a third of people
8 who are released from Rikers every year are back
9 there within a year. Why don't we set up a system
10 when somebody's going to be released, that the
11 service providers on the outside who are meant to
12 help them continue their drug treatment, for
13 instance, they get notice that it's going to happen.
14 We have a system right now to service providers when
15 people are arrested. Why don't we tell them when
16 people are due to be released so we don't miss yet
17 another opportunity. Thank you so much.

18 SARITA DAFTARY: Good afternoon, Chair
19 Brannan, Chair Nurse, Chair Avilés. I am Sarita
20 Daftary. I'm Co-director of Freedom Agenda. We're
21 one of the organizations leading the campaign to
22 close Rikers. Our members have experienced Rikers
23 and been impacted by crime, and they know what works
24 to create public safety, things like housing,
25 healthcare, work opportunities, and mentorship.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

276

2 While Mayor Adams has said he wants to close the
3 pipelines that feed Rikers, his budget would leave
4 gaping holes in our city's mental health
5 infrastructure and social safety net, continuing to
6 funnel vulnerable New Yorkers into Rikers Island
7 where they are subjected to violence, dead-locking,
8 sexual assault, now also the potential of being
9 picked off by ICE. We're calling on the City Council
10 to ensure that the Adopted Budget paves the way for
11 New York City to close Rikers Island, and we
12 appreciate the emphasis the Council has already put
13 on those investments. One important tool we want to
14 point out to is the possibility to reallocate \$150
15 million that the City is currently planning to spend
16 to hire 1,100 more Correction Officers. Instead of
17 spending money on those additional officers, we
18 should be spending-- we should be investing to help
19 New Yorkers thrive. That includes \$70.6 million more
20 to critical mental health and housing needs, \$2.4
21 million for alternatives to incarceration and re-
22 entry programs, \$8.1 million more for the Board of
23 Corrections to adequately conduct their oversight,
24 and \$3 million to begin a masterplan for renewable
25 Rikers. DOC's spending is such an epic scandal that

2 it's sometimes hard to put into context, honestly.

3 This is an agency that a federal judge has described

4 as both over-staffed and undeserved while OMB has

5 pushed for vacancy reductions at agencies that

6 provide vital services to improve people lives. DOC

7 has escaped even the suggestion of such cuts, despite

8 their vacancy rate growing for three years straight.

9 Why is this special treatment being given to the one

10 agency in the city that is actually required to

11 shrink in the next few years under the plan to close

12 Rikers. When the Independent Rikers Commission

13 estimates that the borough jails will require only

14 3,240 uniformed officers are most, why is DOC

15 budgeting for 7,060 which is 1,100 more than their

16 current headcount. DOC has pitched hiring more staff

17 as a way to curb excessive overtime. IBO published a

18 report that shows that's not the case. Just to wrap

19 up, we're grateful that the Council and your budget

20 response is aligned with us and so many New Yorkers

21 and calling for investments in mental health at a

22 scale that finally reaches the need. And we know

23 that OMB is going to tell you. They're going to say

24 there's no money for that. So, we need the Council

25 to be prepared to say there's \$150 million in this

2 budget to hire 1,100 unnecessary Correction Officers,
3 and we need this administration to get their
4 priorities straight. I'll submit along with this a
5 full analysis of the budget that outlines our
6 investment priorities. Thank you.

7 JENNIFER PARISH: Hi, good afternoon. My
8 name's Jennifer Parish. I'm the Director of Criminal
9 Justice Advocacy at the Urban Justice Center Mental
10 Health Project. Thank you for this opportunity to
11 testify and for all the Council has done related to
12 closing Rikers. I'm here today to express our
13 opposition to the Department of Corrections
14 exorbitant budget and urge the Council to reallocate
15 a portion of that agency's \$1.2 billion budget in a
16 way that actually benefits our community and reduces
17 incarceration. Those are investments that will
18 improve public safety and advance the plan to close
19 Rikers. The Department of Corrections has
20 demonstrated to you time and time again that it's
21 incapable of fulfilling its fundamental obligation to
22 keep people in its custody safe and healthy. Just
23 two weeks ago in the class action Nunez versus
24 Department of Correction, Chief U.S. District Judge
25 Laura Swain issued a decision finding it necessary to

2 appoint a remediation manager. This is an individual
3 outside of the department, independent of City Hall
4 to protect the constitutional rights of incarcerated
5 people and reduce jail violence. This decision came
6 after years, actually nine years of being monitored,
7 nine years of failing to comply with the consent
8 judgment and multiple remedial orders. The judge
9 identified 18 core provision that the City was in
10 contempt of. But what the court did not find was
11 that the Department was understaffed. She said that
12 the Department has enormous resources which are not
13 being effectively deployed, and she specifically
14 described it as overstaffed. So, the city must stop
15 pouring money into the dysfunctional Department of
16 Corrections, and that should be done in this year's
17 budget. They have allocated far too much money for
18 uniformed staff, 7,060 officers, and that's not going
19 to happen-- it's not going to be filled. There are
20 1,100 vacancies. And you heard this morning that
21 they testified there's a small number of recruits
22 joining the Department and a significant number of
23 staff that are going to retire. We support all of
24 the budget allocations that are included in the
25 campaign to close to Rikers analysis of the budget,

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

280

2 and we hope that you'll fund them instead of the
3 Department of Correction.

4 ROBERTO PONCE: Thank you, City Council,
5 Chair Avilés and the Committee on immigration, for
6 your attention [inaudible] supporting New York City's
7 immigrant community in the 2026 Fiscal budget cycle.
8 My name is Roberto Ponce, Community Engagement
9 Associate for Hot Bread Kitchen, and I'm testifying
10 today on behalf of Hot Bread Kitchen, an organization
11 that creates economic opportunity through job skills
12 training, food entrepreneurship and a ecosystem of
13 support for individuals who face barriers to
14 meaningful careers. This year we will continue our
15 efforts to provide workforce training for New York's
16 asylum-seeking population. Over the past 17 years,
17 Hot Bread Kitchen has enrolled over 2,000 program
18 participants into our programs to help them launch
19 careers in the food industry, starting to grow their
20 small business and access the resources they need to
21 succeed at work and in the world. Our community
22 includes residents of 50 City Council Districts. 91
23 percent of our members identify as people of color
24 with 86 percent identifying as women. Just over half
25 our members across our programs were born outside of

2 the U.S. and are non-native English speakers with
3 approximately 82 percent of our members unemployed
4 before starting one of our programs. They reach
5 starting wages post-graduation of about \$18 to \$22 an
6 hour. Our members are dedicated, hardworking New
7 Yorkers seeking opportunities for meaningful careers,
8 sustainable income and long-term [inaudible] for the
9 families. We offer our members several programs to
10 reach economic mobility including culinary career
11 pathways for New Yorkers. we provide wraparound
12 support, case management referrals to our 200+
13 community-based organizations to access childcare
14 vouches, affordable housing, mental health services.
15 We provide metro card stipends and job placement to
16 our network of employer partners. We've very
17 grateful to have received funding from the City
18 Council which has supported our growing number of
19 enrolled members and expansion of offerings to other
20 boroughs including Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. With
21 the Council's investment, we have surpassed our
22 three-year strategic growth goal of 1,000 bread
23 winners strong by 2,000 [sic]. We are renewing our
24 efforts to seek the Council's support for culinary
25 career pathways for New Yorkers in Fiscal Year 26,

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

282

2 specifically for the continuation of the needs
3 program and ask for your support for 100,000 Welcome
4 New York City Initiative funding in support for women
5 immigrant worker initiative request. With the
6 arrival of an unprecedented amount of migrants and
7 asylum-seekers in New York City for the past several
8 years, Hot Bread Kitchen developed and launched this
9 program by adapting our training to targeted-- to
10 provide targeted services for the asylum-seeking
11 population. In 2025, we graduated one cohort of 24
12 members, and we just began another one of 25. For
13 both cohorts we have over 500 applications. We
14 continue to serve more New Yorkers each year in
15 accessing [inaudible] and we respectfully urge the
16 Committee on Immigration to support our applications
17 for funding for this vital year. Thank you for your
18 attention and investment in Hot Bread Kitchen's work.

19 MEGAN FRENCH-MARCELIN: Good afternoon.

20 My name is Megan French-Marcelin. I'm the Senior
21 Director of New York State Policy at the Legal Action
22 Center. Today, I testify on behalf of the New York
23 City Alternatives to Incarceration and Reentry
24 Coalition. We are a network of 12 service
25 organizations with decades of experience in providing

2 holistic community-based supports to justice-involved
3 New Yorkers. Collectively we serve more than 30,000
4 New Yorkers each year. Let me start by just saying
5 Rikers has proven to be a terrible and very costly
6 public safety strategy, but our programs are not.
7 These programs are actually some of the most
8 meaningful mechanisms we have available to envision
9 and scale a more just justice system. These programs
10 are not just about human potential, however. They're
11 also evidence-based effective interventions supported
12 by decades of research. In fact, that research has
13 shown us that our programs are more effective
14 than incarceration at reducing recidivism, keeping
15 people from committing new crimes, connecting people
16 to services, and keeping people employed, and we
17 actually do this at a cost much cheaper than the
18 Department of Correction. Incarcerating just one
19 person at Rikers for a year is over \$500,000. ATIs
20 create cost savings. Studies estimate that for every
21 dollar spent on ATIs, between \$3 and \$5 is of
22 benefits are generated. This year, the Coalition is
23 assign for \$2.4 million in additional discretionary
24 funds, and to put that into some perspective, that
25 whole ask is just 10 percent of what the DOC spends

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

284

2 monthly on overtime. If you can read my full written
3 testimony, it has examples of both how we have used
4 discretionary funds in the past and how we plan to
5 use the additional funding to bring these programs to
6 scale and make sure that all New Yorkers have access
7 to effective, holistic, community-driven supports.
8 Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you all very
10 much. Our next panel we have Scarlett Thompson,
11 Andrea Rodriguez [sp?], and Jasmine Joseph [sp?].
12 Okay, whoever wants to start.

13 SCARLETT THOMPSON: Good afternoon. Thank
14 you for the opportunity to speak here today. My name
15 is Scarlett Thompson. I use she/her pronouns, and I
16 am a Senior Prevention Coordinator at the New York
17 City Alliance Against Sexual Assault. I'm here today
18 to speak with you about an often missed point when it
19 comes to conversations about criminal justice which
20 is preventing harm before it can even happen. I'm
21 asking you today to commit to investing \$300,000 to
22 support Outsmart NYC, a program that focuses
23 specifically on sexual violence prevention within New
24 York City nightlife. This program is a collaborative
25 effort with the crime victims treatment center and a

2 collective of people who work in nightlife, some of
3 whom have joined me on this panel today. The rates of
4 sexual violence in the U.S. are staggering. One in
5 two trans or gender non-conforming people, one in
6 four women, and one in six men will experience sexual
7 violence in their lifetimes. Last year, we conducted
8 a survey of New York City nightlife workers in which
9 70 percent of the nightlife staff who responded said
10 that they frequently witnessed sexual violence at
11 work, and 60 percent had experienced sexual violence
12 at work. Outsmart works to prevent sexual violence
13 by training staff to recognize and intervene in harm.
14 We work with managers and owners on policies and
15 environmental changes that increase safety and
16 providing support resources to the nightlife
17 community. We have trained over 100 venues that
18 range from small wine bars on the Lower East Side to
19 clubs that host thousands of people a night in
20 Bushwick. We also provide safety advocacy for
21 massive events like Red Bull's Culture Clash event
22 last year and Pride events throughout June. Our team
23 here at Outsmart has been working tirelessly to
24 support patrons and staff for over 10 years now, and
25 we know how much further our reach could go if the

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

286

2 City Council allotted the \$300,000 we are
3 requesting. Even without the staffing we need to
4 conduct outreach, the demand for our programming far
5 outstrips our current staff capacity to meet it. I
6 implore you to invest in community-based safety
7 efforts led by and for the people who make up the
8 heart of New York City nightlife.

9 JASMINE JOSEPH: Good afternoon and thank
10 you for allowing us to speak today. My name is
11 Jamine Joseph and I work for Outsmart as their
12 Administrative Associate and Social Media Manager.
13 However, I have also been working as a professional
14 DJ in New York City nightlife for over 10 years. I
15 also currently work as a DJ in New York City
16 nightlife in addition to my role at Outsmart. This
17 allows me to do several things. For one, I can bring
18 back experiences that I'm having in my work as a DJ
19 back to the Outsmart team which they use to help make
20 their curriculum and trainings, their bystander
21 intervention trainings which we offer to New York
22 City nightlife venues, as relevant as possible. I'm
23 also tapped into the New York City nightlife
24 community, specifically New York City nightlife
25 workers and performers as somebody who's been dj-ing

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

287

2 in New York City nightlife for over 10 years, and I
3 hear a lot of things through word-of-mouth. Scarlett
4 shared with you stats and stats are great. However,
5 sexual violence is seriously under-reported and
6 especially in the New York City nightlife community
7 where a lot of things that we experience, our jobs
8 and income depend on us being able to tolerate it in
9 so many words. And so I am able to bring back a lot
10 of things that I'm hearing through word-of-mouth from
11 my community to the Outsmart team, and they're able
12 to apply the things that I'm bringing back to them to
13 help tailor their trainings and to help make New York
14 City nightlife community comfortable with us when we
15 come in, because there are nightlife workers on the
16 staff who can speak their language with them.

17 Additionally, I just want to say that prior to being
18 a DJ I was simply a patron. I am a native New Yorker,
19 and I love this city. New York City nightlife is a
20 huge part of the social fabric of this city, and I
21 really truly believe after the past three years of
22 working with Outsmart that the work that they do is
23 incredibly impactful, and I really think that the
24 funding would help us to expand our reach outside of
25 Brooklyn and Manhattan where we're most active to

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

288

2 boroughs like Bronx and Queens and also Upper
3 Manhattan, Harlem where we're really looking to
4 target. So, thanks again for allowing me to speak.

5 ANDREA RODRIGUEZ: Hi everyone. My name
6 is Andrea and I started with Outsmart in May of 2023
7 as the Health Equity Nightlife Liaison. I'm also a
8 patron of nightlife and I also perform harm reduction
9 for nightlife. And as a child of immigrant, I
10 understand the importance of spaces for joy, dance,
11 and also the importance of immigrants in nightlife
12 community. As a queer person, nightlife has been a
13 lifeline. New York has always been a cultural
14 epicenter for the world, and so much of that culture
15 comes from nightlife. What I've come to understand
16 is that nightlife is neutral [inaudible] and will
17 always be there for all of us to celebrate, to
18 grieve, to create, work, inspire, and heal. This
19 space is where many of us can finally decompress and
20 take off the mask we've been wearing all day and
21 sometimes all of our lives. I believe that everyone
22 deserves to return home not safe, but well. Outsmart
23 understands that the health of nightlife goes beyond
24 safety. It's about the wellbeing of everyone and
25 every stakeholder in the room. We meet businesses

2 where they're at. We not signal virtue. We tailor
3 our workshops to reflect the culture of each venue,
4 the people who work there and the communities they
5 serve without compromising our values and principles.
6 We also take the history and context of nightlife
7 seriously. Last year, we brought together a group of
8 trans life-- trans nightlife workers who designed a
9 training specifically to center the wellbeing of
10 trans and gender non-conforming people. This
11 community is not only at higher risk and also has and
12 will always shape so much of nightlife culture in New
13 York and around the world. The training piloted at
14 [inaudible] in Brooklyn included a framework from one
15 facilitators PHD research. It focused on a spectrum
16 of safety for trans people from the absence of harm
17 to the presence of celebration and belonging. It
18 helped staff understand how part of-- how every part
19 of a venue, including how security checks are done
20 can be made more affirming. We're asking for your
21 support so we can continue to support New Yorkers.
22 we're also working in language accessibility as
23 immigrants and nightlife workers are facing
24 unprecedented times and becoming more at risk. We
25 offer workshops right now and information in English

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

290

2 and Spanish at this time. We're asking for your
3 support so we can continue supporting New Yorkers.
4 And if you want to know how healthy a city is, look
5 at its nightlife. And for many of us, a DJ really
6 did save our lives. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Thanks
8 for all you guys do. Okay, this is our final in-
9 person panel before Sandy turns into a pumpkin. We
10 have Kate Tiskus [sp?], Yanki Tshering, Natalia
11 Ardelia [sp?], Richard Flores, and Raul Rivera. You
12 want to begin? Go ahead.

13 UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you so much for
14 holding this hearing today. I want to just talk a
15 little bit about programs that the Council is already
16 supporting that really help make sure that folks who
17 are justice-impacted and people who are immigrants
18 are able to get the services that they need which is
19 becoming even more important as demands on them are
20 made worse and worse by the federal administration.
21 First, there's a bunch of really great workforce
22 development programs that the Council supports. Pride
23 at Work works with LGBT people who are justice-
24 impacted, LGBT people who are without homes, people
25 all over the map, and it's actually the nation's

2 first and only publicly-funded partnership between
3 union high-road employment and queer organizations.
4 It's working like a charm. One of the organizations
5 in it has literally 100 percent employment placement
6 which in this economy is crazy. Also, the Domestic
7 Workers Empowerment Initiative and the Workers
8 Cooperative Business Development Initiative both
9 focus on making sure people who might not have their
10 documents totally in order are able to have safe,
11 dignified access to workplaces, but also to
12 understand and know the rights that City Council has
13 worked really hard to pass for them. The City
14 Council's Human Rights Law work for domestic workers
15 is first in the nation, and in order to be able to
16 use that law, domestic workers got to know about it,
17 which is what the Domestic Workers Empowerment
18 Initiative does. Sort of breezing on to folks who
19 are especially justice-impacted-- support for persons
20 in the sex trades is really kind of hitting all over
21 the map in terms of providing support for people who
22 are coming into the city who are sort of finding that
23 is there first place where they're needing to seek
24 employment. Making sure that they can get access to
25 city services and go about their business safely is s

2 important, and that initiative is asking for an
3 increase to \$7.4 million. And my wrap up sentence is
4 the Sexual Assault Initiative also keeps a close eye
5 on folks who are justice-impacted. It's-- the City
6 Council, not the Mayor, not the State, only the City
7 Council funds the Sexual Assault Initiative. So,
8 thank you for your work with that as well.

9 YANKI TSHERING: Can you hear me? Yeah.
10 Good afternoon, and you know, thank you for your
11 patience. I was concerned that after a certain point
12 we would be asked to leave. So, anyway, thank you to
13 all the members of the Committee on Immigration. My
14 name Yanki Tshering. I'm the Executive Director of
15 Accompany Capital. We're a CDFI, a community
16 development financial institution, and what we do is
17 we focus on providing access to affordable credit,
18 financial education, and training. The loans we
19 provide range from \$1,000 to \$350,000. So, very,
20 very numerous micro entrepreneurs and then going up
21 to working with small businesses. Since our founding
22 we have expanded economic opportunities, primarily
23 for immigrants, refugees, under-served entrepreneurs
24 and we've dispersed over \$68 million in business
25 loans, created 10,000 unique-- 3,000 new jobs and

2 worked with over 10,000 unique businesses and saved
3 more than 11,000 jobs citywide. So while our mission
4 is to create pathways to prosperity for micro and
5 small businesses, their very presence in the City is
6 being threatened by recent Executive Orders as we're
7 all aware, and obviously a lot of the federal funding
8 that we had access to has been decreased or is under
9 threat of being eliminated. Last year, we served
10 clients from over 57 countries. We want to thank
11 City Council for the recent creation of the CDFI
12 initiative, and through this funding our team has
13 already supported 25 businesses. We're on track to
14 serve over 40 businesses and these are businesses
15 that would not qualify for services with the funding
16 we currently have. So these are street vendors,
17 cleaning services and catering businesses. So, we are
18 fully aware that there will be further decreases,
19 restrictions. We have a proposal pending for the
20 CDFI initiative to continue our existing partnership
21 with Asian Americans for Equality and Business
22 Outreach Center to create economic opportunity for
23 over 250 entrepreneurs who currently do not qualify
24 to get services with the current funding we have. We
25 have a grant of-- request of \$330,000 pending. We

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

294

2 strongly encourage you to keep in mind all the risks
3 facing immigrant refugee in the small business
4 communities. These businesses need support. Thank
5 you for your time, and on behalf of everyone at
6 Accompany Capital, we look forward to strengthening
7 and partnering with the other organizations that are
8 represented here. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very
10 much. Go ahead, sir.

11 UNIDENTIFIED: Council Member Brannan,
12 thanks for giving me the opportunity to testify.
13 I've listened to testimony protecting the rights of
14 illegals and migrants at this hearing, including
15 those who are living and working in New York City,
16 those who haven't been deported or those who haven't
17 been imprisoned as a result of committing crime. The
18 reason why I'm mentioning this is yesterday, Memorial
19 Day, I was physically and sexually attacked for being
20 a cisgender male, and I was sitting at a public area
21 outside the offices of 17th State Street which is in
22 the financial district. I was formerly employed
23 there for a company called Shareholders
24 Communications, and I was a CSR there from 1994 to
25 1998, til 2001. In 2001, I witnessed the attacks on

2 the World Trade Center. On 9/11 I was employed there,
3 and I saw unfortunately the events unfold. So I was
4 sitting there for various reasons and one of the
5 reasons was thinking about my past and the fact that
6 I was formerly employed there and thinking about my
7 present and what was actually occurring. And being
8 that yesterday was Memorial Day, it's something that
9 carries a lot of weight in most American's minds,
10 including my own. Now the reason why I'm mentioning
11 this is because-- and I apologizes if it sounds a bit
12 far-fetched. I heard an individual who works as an
13 information agent and another individual who works as
14 a security guard say various times that I would be
15 attacked for being a cisgender male, and I didn't
16 quite understand this. There's a lot of racial bias
17 going on. There's a lot of hate crimes going on in
18 New York. I've seen many things happen.
19 Unfortunately, I've been attacked many times on the
20 street for the last 10 years. I've gone to the
21 police. I spoken to the DOI. I've spoken to Jocelyn
22 Strauber, Inspectors at the DOI, etcetera, over and
23 over again for the last almost 10 years now, and I
24 have documented proof if you need it. And so I'm
25 mentioning this at this testimonial to address the

2 fact that what I still call the prison industrial
3 complex being funded by legislation, I believe is
4 using collisional [sic] data and information that is
5 being used to provide that funding, and what is not
6 being said at this hearing are the other important
7 factors that are affecting every American's rights,
8 including illegals, including migrants who want to
9 become American citizens--

10 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] Sir,
11 could you please wrap up your testimony.

12 UNIDENTIFIED: Sure. And live in this
13 country-- so, I can't go through the rest. What is
14 troubling me is that is this how the American economy
15 is being run? Meaning, this is how we're funding the
16 prison industrial complex? I believe that a lot of
17 the violence that is occurring in this country is not
18 being handled properly. A lot of what I heard today,
19 the testimony that I heard today and the people who
20 are trying to protect the rights of illegals and
21 migrants, I understand. But the climate of violence
22 and fear that is currently plaguing our country is
23 quite another thing--

24 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] Sir, can
25 you please wrap up your testimony. You're now over

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

297

2 time and just out of respect for other people waiting
3 online as well. You can submit any written testimony
4 to the gentleman in the back.

5 UNIDENTIFIED: Okay. All I like to say
6 in closing is that I truly believe there needs to be
7 re-legislation of the law in order for that funding
8 to be used properly. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Great. Thank you
10 for your testimony. Go ahead, sir.

11 RAUL RIVERA: Good afternoon. My name is
12 Raul Rivera. I just want to say before I read my
13 statement that we don't trust the NGOs, the
14 nonprofits. There's something that's going on with
15 all this money being handed out to immigrants. The
16 City has spent \$6.9 billion, and you cannot help
17 immigrants with \$6.9 billion? That's very suspect.
18 I think somebody should look into that. Also, the
19 Chair Avilés is in the back. I'm not sure why she
20 doesn't want to sit down at the chair and take over
21 her chair.

22 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: [interposing]
23 [inaudible] Raul, you have two minutes.

24 RAUL RIVERA: Look at what she's doing.
25 You call that representation?

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

298

2 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: This is coming out
3 of your two minutes.

4 RAUL RIVERA: Yeah, but you call that
5 representation, right? Well, I'm going to-- yeah.
6 You can look up for that \$1 billion that's missing on
7 the Thrive NYC that we spoke about and I asked you to
8 investigate that. That's \$1 billion dollars. So, I'm
9 going to read a quote from Doctor Walfu Sultan [sp?].
10 the trouble with Islam is deeply rooted in its
11 teachings. Islam is also a politically ideology that
12 is-- I'll restart. The trouble with Islam is deeply
13 rooted in its teachings. Islam is also a political
14 ideology that preaches violence and applies its
15 agenda by force. I remind Chair Avilés that it was
16 Muslims who attacked and brought down the World Trade
17 Centers on 9/11. I'll also remind the Chair
18 Palestinians were dancing in the streets of
19 Palestine.

20 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Sir, I'm going to
21 need you to stay on topic, please. We're not here to
22 disparage any religious-- on topic.

23 RAUL RIVERA: This is about--

24 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] Keep it
25 on topic. We good.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

299

2 RAUL RIVERA: It's about immigration.

3 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: Thank you.

4 RAUL RIVERA: I reclaim my time. Chair
5 Avilés believes--

6 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] There's
7 no reclamation. Thank you.

8 RAUL RIVERA: Chair Avilés believes that
9 the struggle of Puerto Rico and Palestine are the
10 same. I'm remind the Chair, Puerto Rico does not
11 hate America like the Palestinians do, and Puerto
12 Rico does not have a terrorist organization called
13 Hamas. You support Zohran Mamdani for NYC who lied to
14 me about publicly denouncing Hamas, Hezbollah and
15 Sharia Law. His campaign team said on camera that
16 Mr. Mamdani put out a statement. We demand--

17 CHAIRPERSON NURSE: [interposing] Sir,
18 this is not on topic, and your time is over.

19 RAUL RIVERA: We demand he produce the
20 so-called statement--

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Thank
22 you for your testimony. Okay, now we're moving to
23 Zoom. Our first for Zoom is Ari-- our first on Zoom
24 is Airenakhue Omoragbon.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

300

2 AIRENAKHUE OMORAGBON: Hi good evening,
3 everyone. Can you hear me okay?

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yes, go ahead.

5 AIRENAKHUE OMORAGBON: Alright. So, my
6 name is Airenakhue Omoragbon. I am the New York
7 Policy Manager at African Communities Together.
8 First and foremost, I'd like to say good evening,
9 Chair Brannan, Chair Avilés and members of the
10 Committees on Finance and Immigration. This is
11 actually my first time doing a virtual testimony. I
12 tend to be there every time, but thank you for giving
13 me the opportunity to speak. So I'm here today to
14 ask City Council to renew \$7.8 million in funding the
15 Language Access Grant to expand vital services
16 ranging from legal and rapid response to critical
17 community education to help New York's immigrants
18 access resources and protect their rights. I make
19 this request in hope and also in expectation that the
20 Council will grant a complete restoration of funding
21 for Afro-Lingual [sic], New York's first and premier
22 African worker-owned language collaborative. Just to
23 give you all some statistics, according to New York's
24 statistics, there are estimated 172,712 immigrants
25 from sub-Saharan Africa living in New York State. In

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

301

2 New York City alone, there are approximately 86,694
3 speakers of African languages and tens of thousands
4 of speakers of French and Arabic. Many of these
5 African language speakers are limited English
6 proficient and studies show that African immigrants
7 are among New York's most language-isolated
8 communities. I thank my colleagues who spoke on the
9 panel earlier from Language Justice Collaborative.
10 They talked a lot about the work that we've been able
11 to do over the last few years. We advocated for New
12 York City's Local Law 30. We pushed for the passage
13 of New York State legislation, New York State
14 Language Access Law, and last year we also worked
15 together to lead a successful campaign that resulted
16 in the New York City Council making an unprecedented
17 investment of \$3.8 million in building the Language
18 Access Workforce. You know, we since receiving that
19 funding, Afro-Lingual has been able to provide New
20 Yorkers--

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Thank
22 you. Time has expired.

23 AIRENAKHUE OMORAGBON: Could I just
24 finish this sentence and then--

25 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Sure go ahead.

2 AIRENAKHUE OMORAGBON: Sorry about that.

3 So, Afro-Lingual, you know, we've been able to
4 provide New Yorkers with worker-owned language access
5 services, interpretation, translation, and English as
6 a second language instruction. The development of
7 this cooperative has also empowered the economic
8 uplift of African immigrants living in the City. So,
9 as everyone knows, this is a very scary time, and you
10 know, there's no moment like now to continue to
11 provide that funding for language access work. So,
12 thank you again for your time, and have a good
13 evening, everyone. And I'll provide the rest in the
14 written testimony. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you. Now we
16 have Danielle Gerard.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

18 DANIELE GERARD: Thank you, Chair Nurse,
19 Chair Brannan and Chair Avilés and committee members.
20 My name is Daniele Gerard. I'm a Senior Staff
21 Attorney at Children's Rights, a member of the New
22 York City Jails Action Coalition. We advocate for
23 young adults on Rikers, and we support closing
24 Rikers. Thank you for your efforts to right-size the
25 administration's lopsided budget. Please, continue

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

303

2 to focus on budget priorities that improve the lives
3 of our incarcerated neighbors and other desperate New
4 Yorkers. Funding 1,100 additional Correction
5 Officers to add to the bloated DOC budget makes no
6 sense given absenteeism and lack of accountability
7 among current staff. For that \$150 million, the City
8 could fund housing, community-based mental
9 healthcare, ATIs and re-entry programs, and more. We
10 need less DOC staff for a smaller jail system, not to
11 continue incarcerating mentally-ill and marginalized
12 members of our communities on the humanitarian
13 disaster that is Rikers. We urge you to continue to
14 put social services at the forefront of any budget
15 expenditures. Every dollar spent on those services
16 does a lot more to increase real public safety than
17 locking up thousands of people at an astronomical
18 cost. And while you are at it, please make our jails
19 as humane as possible with meaningful programming,
20 educational opportunities, recreation, and enough
21 food so that people don't go to bed hungry on top of
22 timely and quality medical and mental healthcare. We
23 urge you to consider the testimony that we submitted
24 on March 7th for your preliminary budget hearing. It
25 explains in detail how Children's Rights believes

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

304

2 this city's criminal legal budget priorities should
3 be realigned to fulfill these objectives. Thank you
4 for your work, and thank you for holding these
5 hearings.

6 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very
7 much. Now we have Donna Hilton.

8 DONNA HILTON: Good afternoon. Can
9 everyone hear me?

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Yes, go ahead.

11 DONNA HILTON: Alright. Thank you.
12 Thank you, Council, for having this hearing and
13 having me present at this hearing. my apologies for
14 not being in-person. But I'm out here boots on the
15 ground. I'm Donna Hilton. I am the Founder and
16 President of A Little Piece of Light. We're a woman-
17 led organization that focuses on the gaps that
18 continues to exist with people that have been
19 traumatized, and that includes-- which I've not
20 really heard so much about right now at this hearing
21 today-- trans people, Black women, Black girls,
22 people who are-- have been in our military who
23 continue to face obstacles and issues. And I just
24 want to focus really quickly, like my colleagues said
25 earlier, the \$1.5 billion that's being allocated to

2 the Department of Corrections to continue a climate
3 of violence and just lack of support and services
4 that people who have identified really need. And so
5 we've been fighting for a few years now just to get
6 10 percent, allocated 10 percent of that budget so we
7 can continue to support the most marginalized of
8 communities that permeate our city. We deal with
9 people that are in Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan,
10 Staten Island, the Bronx, and all over New York, and
11 we continue to have the least amount of services,
12 especially for women. Right now we have housing
13 initiatives that's being shut down as I speak. I have
14 to close them down because we don't have that
15 support. We have been instrumental with the closure
16 of Rikers and getting receivership. We've also been
17 instrumental in passing the largest parole
18 legislation in the country to shut down six prisons
19 and to release those people from custody who do not
20 need to be incarcerated. And so I'm saying here
21 today that we need to focus-- there needs to be
22 stronger focus on boots on the ground organizations
23 that are out there in the streets doing this work
24 daily, responding, having--

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

306

2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Thank you
3 for your testimony. Your time has expired.

4 DONNA HILTON: [inaudible] Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay, next we have
6 Natalie Jamis [sp?], or James.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

8 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Now, we have
9 Sopha Gurule.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

11 SOPHIA GURULE: Thank you all for the
12 opportunity to testify. My name is Sophia Gurule and
13 I'm a Trustee and Constitutional Officer elected
14 union-wide by the workers of the Association of Legal
15 Advocates and Attorneys, United Auto Workers Local
16 2325 which represents over 3,400 legal services
17 workers including immigration legal services workers
18 at the three NYFUP organizations, the Bronx
19 Defenders, Brooklyn Defender Services, and the Legal
20 Aid Society. UAW 2325 supports the three NYFUP
21 organizations in their request to double NYFUP
22 funding from \$5.5 million per organizations to \$11.06
23 million per organization. As a UAW 2325 elected
24 leader, as a line staff attorney in the New York
25 Immigrant Family Unity Project, I'm here to emphasize

2 the dire need for increased NYIFUP funding. I have
3 worked as a senior staff attorney in NYIFUP since
4 September 2017. Though I testify in my individual
5 union capacity and not on behalf of my employer, the
6 Bronx Defenders, my testimony today is based on my
7 nearly eight years of experience representing
8 detained and non-detained New Yorkers facing
9 deportation under three different presidential
10 administrations. Currently, the UAW is hemorrhaging
11 legal services workers whose expertise is in detained
12 and non-detained removal defense. The UAW has lost
13 approximately 20 immigrant legal services workers at
14 the Bronx Defenders in less than two years. For
15 context, that is nearly half of the current staffing
16 numbers in immigration practice. With my nearly
17 eight years of experience, I'm somehow the most
18 senior staff attorney working in NYIFUP at the Bronx
19 Defenders which often shocks my union siblings in
20 different practice areas at organizations like the
21 Legal Aid Society. However, high NYIFUP worker
22 turnover is avoidable. Our ability to stay in NYIFUP
23 depends on having manageable caseloads and salaries
24 that allow us to afford our rent and bills, including
25 our student loan payments. Our wins as unionized

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

308

2 workers are wins for the poor and working class
3 citywide, union and non-union alike. When working
4 conditions thrive, the community thrives. So when
5 any of the NYIFUP organizations lose these workers,
6 that means immigrant New Yorkers who depend on
7 essential deportation defense legal services are not
8 receiving the most experienced advocates or the most
9 consistent legal support--

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Thank
11 you. Your time is expired.

12 SOPHIA GURULE: [inaudible] years. Can I
13 finish my remarks?

14 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Sure, go ahead.

15 SOPHIA GURULE: So, this is-- when
16 workers leave, that caseload is then offloaded to
17 committed advocates but those advocates are
18 increasingly overburdened, less familiar with the
19 nuances of that person's case, and who are doing
20 their best to stay informed on top of rapidly
21 changing immigration law and policy changes. I can
22 personally attest; it is extremely challenging every
23 time a worker leaves NYIFUP. Providing stable legal
24 services is essential to ensure immigrant New Yorkers
25 are materially supported against an explicitly

2 hostile Trump administration. Our work keeps
3 families together. It keeps essential caretakers
4 employed. It ensures immigrant New Yorkers have a
5 consistent legal team to call upon when the Trump
6 administration finds new fun creative ways to
7 terrorize people. New Yorkers need experienced
8 attorneys, paralegals, social workers, because an
9 experienced NYIFUP advocate necessarily means
10 retaining a knowledgeable, fearless, and creative
11 advocate. I can send the rest of my written
12 testimony later, but I do want to invite any of you
13 from the City Council to, you know, witness and
14 observe NYIFUP in action. It's very easy to do. You
15 can go to the virtual court rooms. You can watch any
16 of us. You can reach out to anyone at the UAW and we
17 can connect you to making that possible. I really
18 highly recommend it. It's essential to understand jut
19 how essential our work is. You can observe bond
20 hearings. You can observe deportation trials, or you
21 can just sit a day in the virtual immigration court
22 room of Immigration Judge Charles Conroy who is often
23 required to handle the pro se cases before a NYIFUP
24 attorney is ever actually assigned. So, I'm happy to
25 answer questions. I know I'm well beyond my time,

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

310

2 and I'll be providing the rest of my written
3 testimony.

4 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Thank you very
5 much. Okay, now we have Christopher Leon Johnson.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

7 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah. Hello,
8 Chairs Avilés, Nurse and Chair Brannan. My name is
9 Christopher Leon Johnson. So I'm here to show my
10 support to the Worker Justice Project and the Street
11 Vendor Project with their funding request. They
12 deserve the money. I hope they don't get cut off this
13 FY26 cycle. I know what's going on internally, but
14 they shouldn't be cut off this cycle. While at the
15 same time, I'm supporting their fight against the
16 NYPD with the sticker [sic] situation. I understand
17 that [inaudible] e-bike crisis in the City of New
18 York, but they shouldn't be-- the deliveristas
19 shouldn't be criminalized. I'm calling on City
20 Council to find a way to work with the NYPD
21 [inaudible] NYPD to put exemptions for deliveristas
22 when they do deliveries on the e-bike. They
23 shouldn't be criminalized for delivering food and
24 medicine. I know a lot of people that are sick and
25 medicine is more vital than food, and it shouldn't be

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

311

2 where somebody couldn't get their medicine because
3 somebody got a summons or to the point that one of
4 the deliveristas got arrested because something-- or
5 language barrier of Spanish and Africans and they
6 don't know the language. So, at the same time, I'm
7 calling on the City Council to preserve-- to give
8 the Worker Justice Project [inaudible] funding and
9 Street Vendor Project funding. At the same time, I'm
10 calling on you three, Brannan, Avilés and Nurse to
11 hope you guys, if you have time-- I know tomorrow's
12 Stated Wednesday-- to show up tomorrow for the press
13 conference out on City Hall steps for the
14 deliveristas and the Street Vendor Project. I saw it
15 on the Instagram page and the Twitter page. So I
16 hope you guys show up at that press conference and
17 rally and show your support for the deliveristas. I
18 have a schedule. I have to change everything around,
19 but go out and show my support to those two
20 nonprofits tomorrow. I have to change my schedule
21 around. So I really care. I have something scheduled
22 [inaudible] scrap that and put it to another time.
23 [inaudible] show my support for the deliveristas.
24 So, like I said, at the end of the day, I hope you
25 guys go for that rally tomorrow. I hope you guys find

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

312

2 a way to really compromise with the NYPD to make sure
3 these guys and gals keep-- don't go to court. I know--
4 -

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Thank you
6 for your testimony. Your time has expired.

7 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: [inaudible]
8 for e-bikes. Can I get a few seconds to finish,
9 please. Hello?

10 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Go ahead. Finish
11 up.

12 CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Yeah, so I
13 said nobody should be getting a ticket. Because I
14 say, I've been to court one time for a summons, and
15 if you're not a celebrity or a politician, you're
16 going to be there all day, and I don't-- I don't wish
17 that on nobody, even my worst enemies. So, thank you
18 so much. I hope to see you guys tomorrow at 12:00 at
19 the City Hall steps for the deliverista rally. Take
20 care. Enjoy your day.

21 CHAIRPERSON BRANNAN: Okay. Thank you.

22 Okay, we are finished with testimony. If there's
23 anybody on Zoom or here in chambers who has not
24 testified, who signed up, who wants to testify, raise

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

313

2 your hand now or forever hold your peace. Okay, with
3 that, this hearing is adjourned. Thank you.

4 [gavel]

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

314

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

1 <INSERT TITLE OF MEETING>

315

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21

22

23

24

25

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date June 28, 2025