

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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September 30, 2022

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HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

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

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Carmen N. De La Rosa

Rita C. Joseph

Shekar Krishnan

Francisco P. Moya

Sandra Ung

Adrienne Adams, Speaker

Lincoln Restler

Jennifer Gutierrez

Gale A. Brewer

A P P E A R A N C E S

Manuel Castro, Commissioner of Mayor's Office of
Immigrant Affairs
Zach Iscol, Deputy Commissioner of Mayor's
Office of Immigrant Affairs
Jake Cooper, Deputy Commissioner of New York City
Emergency Management
Dr. Ted Long, Health and Hospitals
Molly Park, First Deputy Commissioner of
Department of Homeless Services
Melissa Ramos, Senior Executive Director of
Department of Education
Rishi Sood, Executive Director Department of
Health and Mental Hygiene
Senator Alessandra Biaggi
Jessica Franco Ramos
Francesca Perrone
Cassie Keith
Nilbia Coyote
Pedro Perez
Murad Awawdeh
Aracelis Lucero
Camille Mackler
Joshua Goldfein
Natalia Aristizabal Betancur
Yesenia Mata
Vianey Romero-Mendez
Jodi Ziesemer
Rex Chen
C. Mario Russell
Debra Presti
Ilze Caroline Thielmann
Siya Hegde
Anne Pillsbury
Patrick Boyle
Juan Diaz
Ariadna Phillips
Karim Walker
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Power Malu
Terry Lawson

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

Scott Hutchins
Charisma White
Dmitri Daniel Glinksi
David Miranda
Stephanie Rupp
Yajaira Saavedra
Eric Lee

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2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good afternoon. This is
3 a microphone check on September 30, 2022, for the
4 Committee on Immigration located in Chambers,
5 recorded by Nazly Petuvi (phonetic).

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good afternoon. At this
7 time, can the Host please start the livestream?

8 Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to
9 today's New York City Council hearing of the
10 Committee on Immigration.

11 At this time, we ask that everybody
12 please silence all your electronic devices.

13 If you wish to testify today, you can
14 come up to the Sergeant's desk and fill out one of
15 these testimony slips.

16 Written testimony can be emailed to
17 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, that's
18 testimony@council.nyc.gov.

19 Thank you for your cooperation. Chair, we
20 are ready to begin.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: [GAVEL] Good
22 afternoon, everyone. I'm Council Member Shahana
23 Hanif, Chair of the Immigration Committee. I would
24 like to thank everyone joining us for today's
25

oversight hearing on the resources and services for newly arrived asylum seekers.

I want to thank our Speaker, Adrienne Adams, my Council Colleagues, representatives from the administration, and public for being here and members of the public for participating remotely.

My Colleague, Council Member Restler, repeated the lines of the poem, the New Colossus, at our rally this morning, but I think they deserve repeating. The most famous line is inscribed on the Statue of Liberty, "give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free," but the next line is perhaps even more powerful, "send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door." As the representatives of New York City it is our job to make sure New York City is a sanctuary to all people, and that is what this hearing is about. New York City is home to almost 3 million immigrants, 40 percent our city's population. In fact, 60 percent of New Yorkers, myself included, are immigrants or children of immigrants. We pride ourselves on the diversity of our city and value the contributions that the newest

immigrants arriving can make to the tapestry of New York.

Now, as we see other states send asylum seekers and migrants to our city without notice, it is our responsibility to respond with swiftness and empathy. Many of these migrants have travelled through harrowing situations to finally arrive somewhere they can seek refuge and build new lives. We are here today for a few reasons.

First, it is important for us, the Council and the public, to better understand the resources and services that are available to asylum seekers and migrants entering the city.

Additionally, it is essential that we examine this administration's approach to providing these services. While in many ways city agencies have done admirable work in responding quickly to this unprecedented crisis, it is clear that in other ways we are failing to meet the basic needs of recent arrivals. Every few days over the past two months we have seen headlines about migrants who have not been provided shelter, food, or other necessary resources by the city. Fortunately, community-based organizations, mutual aid workers have stepped in to

provide some of these necessary resources. We've also read stories of migrants who are isolated without sufficient mental health care or in-language communication. The tragic suicide of an asylum seeker in city shelter earlier this month illustrates the consequences of lack of resources. Most recently, this administration has announced it is placing asylum seekers in tent camps called HERCs. This is being done with seemingly little, if any, planning or collaboration with elected officials, other community representatives, impacted people, stakeholders, or even their own agency personnel. We are in an emergency, there is no doubt, but I want to make it clear this is not how we address the thousands of people coming to our city as asylum seekers. The Orchard Beach location is in a flood zone in the middle of hurricane season. It is outside as cold weather approaches. It is in a transit desert. It is being constructed by a contractor that built Trump's xenophobic border wall. In this hearing, we will be asking this administration why it is pursuing this course of action.

The administration has also stated that despite the right to shelter being law in New York

City, this will not apply at the Orchard Beach sites and future HERRCs. This raises serious concerns about the conditions in these facilities. I disagree wholeheartedly with the administration circumventing right to shelter, and we will be asking questions regarding the consequences of this decision.

The migrants arriving in our city have already run the gauntlet of crossing the border to arrive in the U.S. and in New York City to access the security we can provide. It is incumbent upon us as elected representatives to examine how this administration is or isn't complying with the law and to ensure that migrants and asylum seekers have safe places to stay, adequate nutrition, healthcare, and legal representation while they endeavor to start their lives and contribute to making our city a vibrant and welcoming destination.

How much of the city, state, federal funding the administration anticipates to receive is used to providing housing, food, and legal services to the migrants? What have been the conversations between Mayor Adams and the State federal elected officials to get the stuff done? We have many questions of this administration on how it plans to

fulfil the city's obligations to these recently arrived New Yorkers and look forward to hearing their testimony today explaining their processes and plans.

I want to thank the Committee staff for their work on this issue, a lot of work went into getting to this afternoon's hearing, including Jayasri Ganapathy, Senior Committee Counsel, Jean Florentine Kabore, Finance Analyst, and Joonyang Ahn, Community Liaison. I would also like to thank my incredibly smart, brilliant staff, Chief of Staff Nora Brickner, Legislative Director Alexander Liao, Communications Director Michael Whitesides, and everyone working in the background to make this hybrid hearing run smoothly.

Now, I will turn it over to Speaker Adrienne Adams to give opening remarks.

SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you so much, Chair. Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Adrienne Adams, Speaker of the New York City Council and thank you all who've joined us today. Thank you, Chair Hanif, once again for convening this important hearing on the resources and services for people who have recently arrived in our city seeking asylum from other countries.

Over the past few months, it has been reported that thousands of people have arrived in New York City seeking asylum from their home countries to escape desperate economic conditions, political violence, and other crises. The scale of this migration reflects a dire situation. New York was already offering solace to people seeking asylum when the Texas Governor began sending others to our city in an act of political theater. That is disgraceful. We have heard heartbreaking stories of people sent here after being lied to with promises of jobs, housing, and other resources despite no coordination with New York City so let me be clear. It is despicable for any governor or government official to politically exploit vulnerable people for political gain, moving human beings around as if this is all a game. I assure you this is not a game. These are human lives, families, and children. These political stunts are dehumanizing and they're shameful. It does not escape me that those who are sending vulnerable people to other states without any real concern about the impacts on these lives say they are people of faith. I can tell you as a person of faith the contradiction is glaring. The rhetoric employed by

some false claims that those arriving here in our country seeking asylum are illegal as if this somehow suggests they are deserving of mistreatment. I want to make clear on the record once again which no one who comes to this country to seek asylum is here illegally. Under federal law and as a signatory to international laws protecting refugees, this country has an obligation to offer protection from those fleeing persecution, and this legislative body will strive to ensure that they receive the necessary resources to pursue their claims while in our great city. New York City has a responsibility to live up to its values as a sanctuary city, and this Council intends to help ensure we meet this moment with the compassion and effectiveness necessary in providing the appropriate support to those within our city.

we understand that addressing this crisis is challenging and it's complex. It requires significant coordination across city government and support from our state and federal government partners. Many of our city's non-profit organizations have been working tirelessly to provide resources to individuals and families, filling important gaps. Our city agencies must effectively work together and with

all stakeholders to fulfil the comprehensive needs of those seeking asylum here.

There are serious concerns that the necessary planning steps to ensure adequate housing and resources for those that need it are lacking, leaving major gaps. Our goal is not to point fingers but rather ensure our city's efforts are effective at meeting the scale of this crisis and improved through learning.

On September 22nd, the administration announced in a press release and its intent to open Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Centers with the first one to be located in Orchard Beach. Yet there are many questions about this plan that remain unanswered which many have echoed since the announcement. While additional information has slowly trickled out, there remains many outstanding concerns and questions including about their role, location, and suitability. These centers are not replacements for temporary shelter and, given the strain on our shelter system, there needs to be a better understanding of the city's plan to provide shelter. Furthermore, shelter is just one aspect of support that is needed so I'm very eager to hear what other

forms of assistance the city is providing to those seeking asylum, how this is being done while budget reduction measures are being pursued, and how our city government is responding and intends to successfully respond. It is also helpful to identify challenges that the response effort is facing and can be resolved through collaboration. The city's resources are being pulled from all angles so it's going to take careful planning, meticulous oversight, and ongoing transparency to ensure that appropriate services and resources are provided and that no one slips through the cracks.

I hope that through hearings like this one today we will highlight the real people that have been impacted by this crisis and the supports they need. We also hope to receive greater insight into how the city is providing resources and how the Council can continue to support and improve upon these efforts. We will continue to conduct oversight hearings on this issue to increase transparency and awareness in order to ensure the city's response lives up to our values and the great expectations we have of New York City's government. I look forward to

hearing the testimony of the administration. Welcome again.

Before you begin, I would like to also give my thanks to the Committee staff for putting this hearing together and all of the people who are working in the background and in cyber-land.

I now turn it back over to Chair Hanif.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. I'll pass it to Jayasri.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Speaker. Good afternoon and welcome. My name is Jayasri Ganapathy. I am Counsel to the Committee on Immigration.

I would first like to acknowledge the Council Members who are present with us for the record. I see Council Member De La Rosa and Krishnan and Council Member Ung.

Before we begin testimony, I would like to remind everyone that is joining us via Zoom that you will be on mute until you are called on to testify. I will be calling on public witnesses to testify in panels of four after the conclusion of the administration's testimony and the Council Members'

questions so please listen carefully for your name to be called.

Council Members, you will be called on for questions after the full panel has completed testimony. We will be limiting Council Member questions to three minutes. Please note for the purposes of this hearing, we will be allowing a second round of questioning.

For public witnesses, once your name is called, if you are joining us via Zoom, a member of our staff will unmute you and the Sergeant-at-Arms will give you the go ahead to begin after setting the timer so please listen for that.

For fairness of all testifying today, all public testimony will be limited to three minutes per person. When the Sergeant announces that your three minutes are up, we ask that you please wrap up your comments so we can move on to the next person.

If you do require interpretation services, please let us know. We do have Spanish language interpretation available for this hearing.

I will now swear in the administration. I believe today we have with us the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs Commissioner Castro, we have from

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2 New York City Emergency Management Commissioner Zach
3 Iscol and Deputy Commissioner Jake Cooper. We also
4 have for question-and-answer support from Health and
5 Hospitals Dr. Ted Long, from Department of Homeless
6 Services Molly Park, First Deputy Commissioner, from
7 Department of Education we have Senior Executive
8 Director Melissa Ramos, and from the Department of
9 Health and Mental Hygiene we have Executive Director
10 Rishi Sood.

11 I will first read the oath then after
12 I'll call on each member from the administration to
13 respond.

14 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
15 whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this
16 Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
17 questions?

18 Commissioner Castro.

19 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I do.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Commissioner
21 Iscol.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I do.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Deputy
24 Commissioner Cooper.

25 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER COOPER: I do.

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2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Dr. Long.

3 DR. LONG: I do.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Deputy
5 Commissioner Park.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: I do.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Senior
8 Executive Director Ramos.

9 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RAMOS: I do.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Executive
11 Director Sood.

12 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SOOD: I do.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Commissioner
14 Castro, you may begin.

15 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Good afternoon,
16 Speaker Adrienne Adams, Chair Shahana Hanif, and
17 Members of the Immigration Committee. Thank you for
18 holding this hearing.

19 My name is Manuel Castro, and I am the
20 Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant
21 Affairs. I am joined by Zach Iscol, Commissioner of
22 the New York City Office of Emergency Management as
23 well as my colleagues from Health and Hospitals,
24 Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department
25

of Homeless Services, and the Department of Education who will be available for questions and answers.

Our city with approximately 15,000 asylum seekers arriving in a very short amount of time is currently experiencing a complex humanitarian emergency that has been exacerbated by the Governor of Texas, Greg Abbott, and others who are looking to use this situation for their own political gains.

In the beginning of the summer, asylum seekers were arriving in New York City individually and in small groups. Many arrived in the region particularly in Washington, D.C.-bound buses chartered by the States of Texas and Arizona. Not finding support in Washington, D.C., asylum seekers, many of them found their way to New York City. As of August 5, my office along with other city agencies began to welcome buses at the Port Authority Bus Terminal. However, today we are now seeing an incredibly high number of people arriving on buses coming from the border. Between four and nine buses arrive every day at Port Authority, and other buses and asylum seekers arrive at other bus terminals, shelter intake centers, and airports throughout the city. Hundreds of people are arriving every day.

These individuals range from single adults to families and children. Many have been in the U.S. for only a couple of days before being bused from the border to New York City, but, unlike previous groups of migrants and asylum seekers, those arriving now are less likely to have a friend, family member, or sponsor contact with whom to reside. They are arriving to New York City with little more than the clothes on their back.

In response, New York City has launched a multi-agency effort to address this unprecedented humanitarian emergency. Unlike the Governors of Texas and Arizona, we have welcomed asylum seekers with humanity, showing them the respect they deserve. On August 1, Mayor Eric Adams launched an emergency procurement declaration to rapidly procure shelter and other services for people seeking asylum in the United States and arriving in New York City. In addition to the supports provided at the shelters and through the education system, we opened New York City's first Asylum Seeker Resource Navigation Center. The Center operated by Catholic Charities of New York through a city contract is supporting individuals and families who have arrived in New York

City on or after January 1, 2022. The Center serves as a central place where newly arrived asylum seekers receive free and confidential help to assess a variety of important services and resources that will help them integrate and thrive in New York City. The Navigation Center provides families with access to everything from healthcare to education to immigration legal services orientation so that they can build a life in New York City. These services are also available across, as I said, our shelter system and through our education center. The Center is located at the American Red Cross Headquarters and is open weekdays to provide individuals and families with in-person free and confidential help. New York City government agencies and community-based organizations are on-site helping with case management and connecting to critical services. The Navigation Center is accessible by appointment currently. Community-based organizations and city shelter caseworkers are scheduling appointments for asylum seekers. The City will provide asylum seekers with information about the Navigation Center as they arrive by bus as well as in shelters and through community-based organizations in the five boroughs.

In the coming weeks, the City will release information about the satellite sites where asylum seekers can access similar or additional services throughout the five boroughs.

Finally, it is critical and paramount that our local government, the state, and the federal government work together with our administration to further confront the challenges of this complex humanitarian emergency. However, in the interim we will continue to advocate for the necessary tools to support arriving asylum seekers. Such resources will include opportunities to access federal government assistance via FEMA's Emergency Food and Shelter Program, the Community Development Block Grants, and the Emergency Solutions Grant. Lastly, we will continue to urge U.S. DHS to provide asylum seekers with expedited employment authorization. We just can't do this alone.

I don't know when this humanitarian emergency will end, but what I do is that in New York City we have been and will continue to be a welcoming city, a city of immigrants, and we'll continue to come together to support those seeking refuge and will be a beacon of hope for so many around the

world. We have, and under this administration will, continue to welcome asylum seekers from every corner in the world and ensure working with our Council Members and our Colleagues in government that these newly arrived immigrants will have the support they need to thrive in our neighborhoods.

Lastly, I want to thank my entire team at Immigrant Affairs for going above and beyond to help those in need and to all the city employees who are stepping up to remind the world what New York City is all about. Unlike Governor Abbott and Governor DeSantis, New York City will always stand on the right side of history, and I think we've demonstrated that so far.

I want to also thank the community-based organizations that are here today, especially Team TLC and the volunteers that have been working tirelessly every morning to welcome asylum seekers from the first day we began working with them at Port Authority. I want to thank the New York Immigration Coalition, the Hispanic Federation, Mixteca, and other organizations that are here who have also been collaborating with us at our Welcome Center at Port

Authority to make sure that asylum seekers receive the welcome they deserve.

I also want to acknowledge Pedro who is here today who will be testifying. He is an asylum seeker who recently arrived in one of the buses that we're welcoming at Port Authority. He's here with Team TLC. I want to thank him for his courage and for being here to give voice to asylum seekers who've been through so much and just want to say in Spanish, (speaking Spanish).

Lastly, as many of you know, I myself crossed the U.S./Mexico border when I was five with my mother, and I just want to express that it has been the honor of my life to be able to welcome asylum seekers as I wish my family would've been welcomed here when we arrived those many decades ago. You have my commitment to continue to support asylum seekers and fight every single day for immigrant communities in New York City. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Thank you. If I may, Commissioner, it's also been one of the honors of my life to be able to work alongside you in this work so thank you.

Before I begin, I just want to take a minute and recognize the loss yesterday of FDNY Lieutenant Alison Russo-Elling and express my sincere condolences and sorrow and grief for her family, her loved ones, and the men and women of the FDNY EMS. Thank you.

Good afternoon, Speaker Adams, Chairperson Hanif, and Members of the Committee. I am Zach Iscol, Commissioner of New York City Emergency Management, and I am here to discuss the coordinating role that New York City Emergency Management is playing in the current surge in asylum seekers in New York City.

First, I want to briefly explain our role in city government and in emergency response. New York City Emergency Management helps New Yorkers before, during, and after emergencies through preparedness, education, and response. The agency is responsible for coordinating citywide emergency planning and response for all types and sizes of emergencies. It is staffed by more than 200 dedicated professionals with diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise, including individuals detailed from other city agencies. As the coordinating agency for the

City of New York, Emergency Management functions as a general facilitator when it comes to emergency response. We ensure that resources are available for our sister agencies to complete their core competencies and serving New Yorkers in what can be their worst days with compassion and cultural competency.

The recent influx of asylum seekers seeking refuge in New York City is an incredibly challenging task, and it's a great example of collaboration amongst our city agencies. We are facing a humanitarian crisis, and it has never been clearer that we need to help and support them. Emergency Management continues to coordinate between the incoming buses of asylum seekers and providing logistical support to the operations of the Asylum Seeker Resource Navigation Center. The Center, which opened on August 25th and is operated by Catholic Charities of New York through city contract, streamlines city and non-profit services into a one-stop shop. It serves as a central place for newly arrived asylum seekers to receive free and confidential help, accessing important services and resources that will help them integrate and thrive in

New York City. Emergency Management is also coordinating with city agency partners at the Welcome Center located at the Port Authority. Those arriving can receive light medical care, water, PPE, and COVID testing. EMS is also located there in the event that someone needs emergency treatment. Individuals can also receive information for shelter in the event that they do not have friends, family, or a sponsor to lean on.

Emergency Management is also coordinating the opening of Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Centers. The first, in Orchard Beach, will serve adults and will likely open next week. These Centers will be operated by Emergency Management and Health and Hospitals completely outside of the DHS shelter system. They will be the first touchpoint for arriving asylum seekers by immediately offering shelter, food, medical care, casework services, and a range of settlement options including through connections to families and friends inside and outside of New York City in addition to, if needed, direct referrals to alternative emergency support or city shelters. All spaces will be safe, secure, climate controlled, and are built to withstand

weather year-round. Emergency Management has an emergency contract that will provide for wraparound services such as food and water, clothes, diapers, and other care products and other human service needs. This is a true interagency effort, and we continue to work with our partner agencies as well as contracted partners and providers to provide comprehensive on-site services and referrals.

We do not know when the influx of asylum seekers will end or when it will slow down, but we are here for the duration of this event. New York City is a cultural mecca enriched by its diverse population and a second home to those who make the difficult decision to leave their home country in search of opportunities. Emergency Management is proud to assist in this humanitarian effort. It is not only our responsibility as a city to help them adjust and regain their livelihoods, but I believe it's an incredibly important investment in the future of New York City.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much. I'd like to acknowledge my Colleague, Council Member Jenn Gutierrez for joining this afternoon.

Thank you so much and I've had the honor of being at the Port Authority on several occasions and having to see exactly how the welcoming is taking place and seeing your leadership, Commissioner Castro, on the ground very, very early hours of the morning and inviting asylum seekers in with grace and dignity and love. I've seen the work of TLC, I've seen the work of the New York Immigration Coalition, the South Bronx Mutual Aid, NICE, Mixteca, Masbia, and so all of that is also informing the questions I'll be asking, but I want to begin with Commissioner Iscol and our right to shelter.

Again, the Mayor shared that right to shelter protections will not apply to the HERRCs. I recognize that these are extremely challenging circumstances and in so many ways our city agencies have stepped up to meet the moment. However, I want to share that I wholeheartedly disagree with the decision and that we should be doing everything we can to provide asylum seekers with decent conditions that meet bare minimum standards. The right to

shelter is a right that applies to everyone in New York City. No amount of legal gymnastics can justify what's happening here. The administration is carving out asylum seekers from this basic right. Can you share specifically which elements of right to shelter protections under the Callahan consent decree will not be in place in the HERRCs?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Let me start by saying the city is 100 percent committed to meeting our legal requirements under Callahan and right to shelter, and the HERRCs are not a replacement for right to shelter or the shelters nor are we carving out a population from right to shelter. In fact, what we have identified with this population is there are distinct needs that need to be met when they get off the buses, and right now we are trying to meet that at the Port Authority terminal, and that is not the best place to do it. You've been there, you've seen the operation. The teams there are doing great work, but the buses come in, we immediately try to provide people, see if there's people that have immediate medical needs, and then we basically are putting people into one of three groups. They're either meeting up with their

family members, they are getting reticketed somewhere else, or they're going into our shelter system, and we have about 45 minutes to an hour to do all of that work, and that is simply not enough time. It's not enough time to provide them the care and the concern, in your words the grace and dignity and love that they deserve, and so these HERRCs are really set up not to replace the shelter system but to give us the space and time to do that operation correctly, to make sure that we are figuring out what the needs of people are, to welcome them with a shower, a warm meal, meet their immediate medical needs, and then figure out what the next step is going to be for them, whether that is the shelter system, whether it's reticketing somewhere else, whether it's reuniting them with a family member or a sponsor, that's the purpose of that operation. By no means is it there to replace or somehow prevent them from entering the shelter system and anybody who wants to go in the shelter system can still do so.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Just to get back to the original question, the right to shelter protections are in place?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: For the single adult
HERRCs, will beds be at least three feet apart?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: We are still
figuring out the exact spacing of the beds and also
of showers and those types of facilities as it's
being set up.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Could you repeat that
one more time?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yes, we're
still figuring out some of the placements of where
beds and showers and those ratios right now.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So right now you're
unsure is they will be three feet apart?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Again, if
you're referring to Callahan, anybody who wants to
enter the shelter system is able to do so.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Will beds be at least
30 inches in width?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I can get you
those details on what the beds will actually look
like and the spacing.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I'm asking these
questions and I've got a couple more because a photo
was released sharing what this tent city would look

2 like, and, based off of that photograph, it does not
3 seem like we're meeting the right to shelter...

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I don't know
5 what the photograph is that (INAUDIBLE) The
6 facilities don't have beds put in yet so those are
7 not photos from the facility that we have set up.
8 Again, I'm happy to share more information about the
9 size of cots...

10 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I mean that would be
11 great the construction is in place and right now you
12 don't know if beds will be at least three feet apart,
13 you don't know if beds will be at least 30 inches in
14 width.

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I don't have
16 that information on me, but I'm happy to get it to
17 you.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Will basic clean
19 linens be provided, like pillows, pillowcases,
20 blankets, sheets?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yes.

22 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Will there be one
23 shower per every 15 residents?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: That's the
25 objective, correct, Dr. Long?

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2 DR. LONG: Yes.

3 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: That's the
4 objective.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Will there be one
6 toilet per every 10 residents?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: It might be
8 16, but, again, I can get you those exact numbers.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: 16 residents? Will
10 residents be offered a way to store or lock their
11 personal belongings and valuables?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay, could you share
14 a little bit more about where?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I'm happy to
16 provide more of that information.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Do you have a sense
18 of...

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: We were going
20 to be using lockers and other types of storage
21 facilities.

22 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Inside the...

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yes, inside
24 the facility.

25

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: How will you accommodate migrants with disabilities including physical, mental, and cognitive disabilities at these sites?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I will turn that over to Dr. Long from Health and Hospitals.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

DR. LONG: Just at the outset, I want to thank you for convening us together. These questions are really important for us to hear now so that we can effectively plan all this together moving forward.

As New York City Health and Hospitals is going to be operating the new emergency humanitarian centers, we take very seriously making sure that everybody feels comfortable so per ADA standards we're going to have an actual ADA coordinator so that anybody with disabilities can have somebody that they can talk to and we're making sure that all of the facility requirements are going to meet ADA standards but more than that to make sure that people that have disabilities have somebody they can go to and discuss what their needs are so we can make sure that everybody's comfortable and all needs are met.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Does that ADA coordinator exist at the moment?

DR. LONG: They will exist prior to it opening.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay, so right now as we welcoming asylum seekers, over 15,000, how have those with disabilities received accommodations?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: The Department of Homeless Services shelter system which has been serving the bulk of the asylum seekers that have come in thus far, there may be others who are with friends and family who have never come into the shelter system but the 15,000 refers to those who have come to DHS. We have a range of accessible facilities across our system, not every shelter certainly, but as either a family or a single adult comes into the system we will assess their needs. If there's an obvious and apparent need, for example somebody in a wheelchair, we will immediately place them in an accessible facility. If they have needs that are less obvious and apparent, for example they need a refrigerator for medication, we will work with them to document that and place them in a site that can accommodate those needs.

1 COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Moving on to families,
3 will families with minor children be given private
4 dwellings?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: We're still in
6 the process of setting up additional HERRCs and
7 identifying locations, but the answer to that is yes.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Do you have a location
9 for...

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: We do not at
11 this time.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: When will you have
13 that?

14 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: We're working
15 on it as quickly as possible. We are still looking at
16 locations that provide the ability to house families
17 with young children with privacy and in non-
18 congregate settings.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Just to have this on
20 the record, can you commit to not placing families
21 with minor children in congregate settings.

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I can tell you
23 that we do not want to place families in congregate
24 settings, yes.

25

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: You do not want to, but you're making it sound like there's a possibility that there might.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I can tell you this is an unprecedented humanitarian crisis and that I can't tell you what is going to happen in two weeks or three weeks or four weeks, but I can tell you this administration is 100 percent committed to not housing children in congregate settings, yes.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: How will adult families with minor children be served at HERRCs?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: The details of the family HERRCs are still being worked out.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Will couples be able to stay together?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Just continuing on our right to shelter, the administration has justified circumventing right to shelter by saying placement in the HERRCs is voluntary and that asylum seekers can choose at any point to utilize the traditional shelter system. I want to dig in here a little bit. Isn't centralizing intake and wraparound services on

2 Orchard Beach effectively coercing people into
3 foregoing their right to shelter?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Not at all.
5 The purpose of the HERRCs is to figure out what
6 people's next move is, and I think we should be clear
7 to that somebody entering the shelter system is not
8 necessary a success if their goal is to get to Miami
9 or their goal is to get to San Antonio or their goal
10 is to link up with a family member, and the HERRCs
11 provide us that mechanism to do that. If somebody's
12 next destination is a shelter, we will get them to a
13 shelter immediately.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Of the asylum seekers,
15 who've arrived, how many have had another destination
16 to go to?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: It's 22
18 percent.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Could you give a
20 number?

21 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: There's been
22 just over 15,000 that have entered the shelter
23 system. Subtract 78 percent and there you go.

24 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: What mechanisms are in
25 place to ensure that asylum seekers know that they

2 have the option to bypass the HERRCs system and
3 utilize a shelter system where they will have
4 superior conditions?

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: We are
6 providing a legal orientation to asylum seekers when
7 they enter the HERRCs. Dr. Long, anything that you'd
8 want to add to that?

9 DR. LONG: No.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: No? Okay.

11 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Could you repeat that
12 one more time?

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: We are
14 providing a legal orientation to asylum seekers as
15 part of the intake process, and I think it might also
16 be helpful for Dr. Long to explain the intake process
17 and what we're doing actually when folks arrive. The
18 work that Health and Hospitals is doing is truly
19 remarkable in terms of the care that they're
20 providing and the compassion and the way that they
21 have set this up. They truly are world class. Dr.
22 Long.

23 DR. LONG: This is a crisis, and we at New
24 York Health and Hospitals raised our hand to want to
25 do our part to help.

I'll walk you through the experience of an adult, not just single adults, but adults that would be coming into one of our new Emergency Humanitarian Centers. Right now, the buses are going to Port Authority. You'll get on another bus to come to one of our new Humanitarian Emergency Centers. You'll get off the bus and you'll be greeted by a comfort team. We know that you've come a long way to see us here in New York City. We're going to offer you food and water before we do anything else. Next, we're going to get started on the mainstay of what we do at the Humanitarian Center. We're going to start with case management. Our goal is to figure out where you want to go and do everything in our power to help you to get there so we're going to start that on day one and, as Commissioner Iscol said earlier, right now that piece is being done in 45 minutes as you know at Port Authority. What if you want to get through to a relative and they don't pick up the phone? Then you've lost the opportunity there. We want to give a full 24 to 96 hours for us to do everything in our power to, again, get you where you want to be. Once you start that process, we're also going to orient you to a variety of other things on-

site. I was just there myself this morning. Yes, we're going to have cots in separate areas. There's going to be one area for single men that are adults, we're going to have one area for single women, and we're going to have one area for couples or people that are adults, maybe a mother and an adult child, something like that. We're going to orient to where you're just going to be staying, but, during the day, we're going to have a dining hall that's going to have three hot meals a day that's all going to be with South American cuisines with multiple options for people with (INAUDIBLE) dietary preferences. We're going to have recreation rooms to make sure that people can hopefully take an opportunity to get a breath. They've come a very long way. We're going to have iPads, we're going to have phones so that you can try to reach out to family members, and the purpose of this short-term stay, and I actually think the Speaker said this very nicely, is we want to provide compassion and effectiveness to achieve the goal of the unique needs of people coming into our city, individuals and families seeking asylum, and one of their goals we know is to get to different places, either inside or outside of our city. 45

minutes at Port Authority is not enough time. 96
hours with a strong focus and us doing everything in
our power to help them I think we stand a much better
chance of being able to make the difference that we
seek to make. We're also going to be providing some
other services, which I'm happy to talk about now or
later at the Humanitarian Centers as well including
medical care.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: How many staff or
personnel will be there to administer this form or
process?

DR. LONG: We're going to have hundreds of
staff there but not just our staff. Last night, I
personally reached out to some of our most engaged,
and thank you for joining us today to our community-
based organizations, you are your communities, and we
want to make sure that this is not just our staff,
it's a combined effort. If we work together at all of
this, we're going to have a stronger response. If
you're at one of our Humanitarian Centers, it may be
a member of our staff that's talking to you, it may
be a doctor that's talking to you, or it may be a
community-based organization that's talking to you,
and I am proud to be a New York City resident knowing

that that's our approach. It's not just outsourced staff. It's really New Yorkers that are stepping up to take care of our own.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I'll pass it to our Speaker for her questions.

SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you, Chair. Thank you all again for your testimony thus far. Dr. Long, you really just hit on something that I was going for first so you just hit on that. I was going to ask for those, the majority that have never gone to Port Authority to see what it looks like when an asylum seeker steps one foot off of the bus, I was going to ask you to take the room through the process and you just did that so thank you.

Let's talk about Orchard Beach. Orchard Beach is a remote part of the city. It's not serviced well by public transportation so I think the vast majority of us and probably of our New York City wants to know why this location was chosen.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I'm happy to take that. Thank you, Speaker Adams, for your question. My team has now looked at over 60 locations across the city, and I want to start by saying there is no perfect location to do this work. There simply

isn't. There are some that are filled with warehouses filled with chemicals and equipment, asbestos. There are places that have programming that we would have to displace. There are places that have a whole host of other issues and so our team has to go out and go through a process of making sure that the spaces meet these needs. Orchard Beach is only the first of probably many other HERRCs that we might have to establish. It's also the one that we could build the quickest, and the intent is not to keep the HERRC in Orchard Beach going for a long period of time, but, again, we don't know how the needs are going to develop. We are well-aware of many of the concerns of Orchard Beach in terms of transportation. We are working with the State to create transportation options for people to get to the 6 train from Orchard Beach. We have a request for them to provide bus service from 5:40 a.m. to 12:40 a.m. so 20 hours throughout the day to provide that option for people to have transportation.

SPEAKER ADAMS: Does it look like that will be set up by next week when you're due to go live?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yes, and we have other transportation options as well to transport people to shelters and other places that they might need to go through shuttles and other services. In addition to that, I know there's a lot of concern raised, and Council Member Hanif brought this up about the flood zone. There are different types of flooding that we have to prepare for. There are coastal storms, there is flooding caused by tides, and there is flooding caused by rainfall. When you think about a coastal storm like a hurricane, you generally have three to five, maybe six days in advance to prepare, and, if we evacuating Zone 1, Hurricane Evacuation Zone 1, we are evacuating about 500,000 people. If it's two zones, it's about a million people and so the plan would be to take the asylum seekers and put them into our coastal storm shelters just like we would anybody else. The buildings that are being constructed up there, I don't like using the word tents because they can sustain 90 miles per hour winds. They actually drill down a few feet in order to place them in the ground. These are very sturdy structures, but they can remove

the panels, they can remove the tops, and they can withstand significant weather events.

In terms of tidal flooding, King tides coupled with a nor'easter, we are setting up what are called tiger dams which are flood mitigation efforts to protect that site in the case that that would happen.

In terms of rainfall, flooding from rainfall, the entire city is in a flood zone when it comes to rainfall. We learned that last year during the tragedy of Ida, and so for those types of events we will have to deal with rainfall no matter what site we use if it's outdoors.

SPEAKER ADAMS: Yeah, I appreciate your response. This, though, is different in that we are actually accepting hundreds and thousands of individuals here so we are responsible for them whereas you and I have a choice of going home, knowing that I live in Southeast Queens in a flood zone by the way, but that's my choice to be there so we are actually bringing people into our house and possibly suspecting them to hazard.

Did the administration consider any other locations prior to Orchard Beach?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: As I said, we have looked at over 60 locations, and we are continuing to look at other locations, and it's our hope that at some point in time we displace Orchard Beach to another location. As I have said, we need help in finding locations. We are looking for places with over 150,000 square feet. That's essentially the size of three football fields. If there are places in any of your districts that come to mind, we would love your help in identifying places where we could do this work.

SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. Now we know that we have heard from our Bronx Borough President with regard to this location. Her concerns are our concerns as well. Were there any conversations that were held with elected officials in the Bronx or with any community organizations with the Bronx prior to choosing Orchard Beach?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: We spoke to them the day of.

SPEAKER ADAMS: So there really wasn't any preliminary discussion, let's have a talk about this, let's have a session about this?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Not for
3 Orchard Beach, but we will make sure we do that in
4 the future for other locations.

5 SPEAKER ADAMS: Okay. That would be my
6 strong suggestion. I think you told us this already,
7 but let's just hear it again. Are asylum seekers
8 required to be processed at the Orchard Beach
9 location?

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: They are not.

11 SPEAKER ADAMS: They are not? Okay. How is
12 this communicated to them? Has it been made clear to
13 them that they have other options or how will this be
14 communicated to them as far as the process is
15 concerned and what (INAUDIBLE)

16 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: For the
17 intake?

18 DR. LONG: Yeah, as part of the case
19 management that we're doing we will make sure that
20 that is clear. Again, our goal in doing this if you
21 want to get, I don't know why you'd want to be
22 anywhere other than New York City, but if you do want
23 to be somewhere other than New York City we want to
24 make sure that we're helping you to get there. Molly
25 can share more about this, but we're seeing a lot of

individuals and families seeking asylum that are coming into our city that really are trying to get to families in other places, and it's really hard to navigate, and it's certainly, as you know Chair Hanif, we can't do all that at Port Authority. We have to have the right space and the right technology to be able to effectively get you where you want to go. Maybe you can share some examples of why this is so important.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Sure. These are all anecdotal, but we again and again see cases where families have been separated so sometimes these are a father separated from wife and child. They end up on separate buses, sometimes end up in separate cities where there's a lot of family reunification that needs to happen or people who were intending to go to places other than New York City, and, because of the way the bussing process happened from the border, they arrived here even though they would've liked to get off some place in between or, as was mentioned, be in Miami or elsewhere so we try and do that work as well of connecting people either to their families from whom they've separated or to the locations where they would like to go. That's something that we do at

shelter intake when we can, but, much like the situation at the Port Authority, our intake centers were not designed for what we are seeing. We've had a 30 percent increase in the shelter census in six months. Typical intake at, say, 30th Street for single adult men is 60 people a night. We're getting 300, 400, 500 people coming through there in a single day so our ability to do that, at the moment, case management is also very limited so I think having this moment to pause and help individuals identify what their right next step is is going to be really useful for the individuals but also for the homeless shelter system.

SPEAKER ADAMS: I believe you mentioned 22 percent is the number of those that are going elsewhere other than New York, correct?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yeah. I think one of the things that you're seeing, especially the buses coming out of El Paso, you have to understand we don't control the buses, we don't control where the buses go, we don't control where they drop people off, we don't know if we're going to be able to get the charter companies to go to Orchard Beach or if we're going to have to transport people from Port

Authority to Orchard Beach or if it's going to be a mixture. A lot of people are getting on those buses from El Paso because it is the only way out of El Paso and so we even had somebody, correct me if I'm wrong, Commissioner Castro, that left El Paso to New York to get to San Antonio because it is just easier to get anywhere from New York than it is from El Paso. We believe that there's probably a lot more people than 22 percent that are looking to get to other locations.

SPEAKER ADAMS: Yeah. When a person or persons, when a family decides that New York is not my destination of choice, I'd rather be in Connecticut, I'd rather be in Massachusetts, we then put them on another bus and send them off to that location?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: There's a variety of processes. Commissioner Castro, do you want to talk about how that's currently done at Port Authority?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I have to say and acknowledge Team TLC who's here today who's been doing this work since before this situation started. We've learned a tremendous amount from working with

1 them at Port Authority. They've been really
2 instrumental in being able to reticket people to
3 different destinations, and, frankly, this is a way
4 to relieve the resource-heavy process of having to
5 reticket someone. I should mention that the largest
6 population of Venezuelans live in Florida, for
7 instance, and so the majority of people arriving are
8 from Venezuela who want to be close to family and
9 friends so to reticket folks to Florida it would take
10 a bus or even a flight, and we don't the expense and
11 the brunt of that to be on the non-profits. Instead,
12 we want to be able to pay for that and coordinate
13 that effort and allow non-profits to provide other
14 types of support to these individuals.

16 SPEAKER ADAMS: Understood. Thank you very
17 much. I'm going to ask one more question. Before I
18 do, I just want to acknowledge that we're being
19 watched by former Immigration Chair Carlos Menchaca
20 who I served with for many years in this Council. Hi,
21 Carlos. He is in El Paso with his family right now
22 too, and he's very interested in this hearing as
23 well.

24 We know that we have a maximum of 96
25 hours that we're dealing with for the asylum seekers

at the Orchard Beach location so how are we going to track this, how are we tracking the maximum hours that individuals will be retained at Orchard Beach?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I'll turn this over to Dr. Long in one second to answer that, but I just want to be clear the goal is 96 hours. This is an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. There are some estimates in terms of the tens of thousands of asylum seekers who could come here, and so I just want to make sure that we're setting that expectation. Dr. Long.

DR. LONG: Yeah, I think as Commissioner Iscol said, if it looks like it's going to take 100 hours, 110 hours, 120, whatever it is to get you where you need to go, the whole reason we're doing this is to help you and get you where you need to go and we're going to get to know you while you're there so there's not a hard and fast at 96 hours that triggers something to happen. It's good to set a goal, though, and our goal is instead of, again, having the concentrated amount of time, which I want to say you've done God's work at Port Authority, I think we've done everything possible there to help people but we want to do more built on the great work

that our non-for-profits have done so far at Port Authority, and we want to give ourselves 96 hours to do that work. If it looks like it's going to take longer though, we're not going to shy away from doing what we need to do to do the right thing for individuals and families that will be staying with us at our humanitarian centers.

SPEAKER ADAMS: Thank you very much. I do have another meeting to go to. I appreciate your testimony here today. I would like for my Colleagues, and I'm going to be watching after my meeting, for my Colleagues to, and I know they will, to touch on this stress of the system because that would've been my next line. If I had the opportunity to do another round, I would go into the stress on our current system, but I do thank you for your testimony today. Thank you, Chair.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much, Speaker, for your excellent questions.

I want to pick up on the reticketing. Commissioner Castro, I know you gave a shoutout to TLC. Is TLC effectively covering the costs or do your agency have funding to cover the cost of the tickets?

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Team TLC and
3 sometimes other non-profits cover the cost of
4 reticketing. DHS has resources to also reticket as
5 Molly mentioned. We really want to centralize things,
6 however, and take resources that we now have
7 available to be able to reticket at the humanitarian
8 center.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So as of this week,
10 has MOIA reticketed any?

11 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: No, the City does
12 not reticket. Initially, it was very difficult for us
13 to reticket individuals because we did not want to be
14 caught in the same type of loop that Texas and others
15 were, sending folks out to other locations, but we
16 figured out how to do that, and, as Dr. Long said, we
17 want to make sure to have the time to support
18 families to get to their next destination. That's
19 something that's really difficult to do at the Port
20 Authority with a short amount of time we have there.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Has DHS covered any
22 costs of tickets?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes, DHS has a
24 program, a longstanding program actually, that
25 facilitates people's move to friends or family

elsewhere in the country. Early on as the emergency started to build, we made some changes to that program. We used to require some forms of documentation that weren't possible for the asylum seekers so we have streamlined the documentation requirements, and we have used that. We do do it, but it is challenging it is challenging even in the immediacy of DHS intake, which is, while not 45 minutes, still a high volume and very focused process so it is something that happens more at the shelter system so after people have already made it further into the process so I think the HERRCs present an opportunity to connect people with that reticketing earlier in their experience with New York City.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: As of this week, how many people's tickets have DHS paid for?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: I'm going to have to follow up with you on that number.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Commissioner Castro, for the gracious work that TLC has done to purchase tickets, do you know how much money has gone into reticketing?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: From Team TLC, I believe it's tens of thousands. We'll have to connect

with Team TLC. Again, they've done a tremendous amount of work with little resources, mostly with volunteers so we're working with Grannies Respond who is their physical sponsor, 60,000 dollars I'm told that it's cost Team TLC to be able to...

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's a lot of money.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Does the City plan to reimburse them?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We're working with Grannies Respond to get up to speed to be able to contract with the City. As you know, it's an involved process. Team TLC does not have a 501(c)(3) and so they'll need to use Grannies Respond who is their national umbrella group to be able to engage with city contracting processes.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. Okay.

Commissioner Iscol, I just want to come back to the right to shelter stuff again, and some of what you've outlined during our earlier conversation contradicts right to shelter and so I just want to ask on the record, yes or no, will the facility meet the right to shelter requirements?

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: The facility
3 is not a homeless shelter. The facility is a
4 humanitarian emergency response and relief center...

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Can you plainly say
6 yes or no?

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Our homeless
8 shelters run by DHS meet all of the requirements of
9 Callahan because they are homeless shelters. These
10 are not homeless shelters. They don't fall under
11 Callahan, but where we meet the requirement of
12 Callahan is anybody who wants to go to a homeless
13 shelter is more than welcome to do so but these are
14 emergency relief and response centers to meet the
15 needs of this humanitarian crisis.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. So they won't
17 meet the need for right to shelter.

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: They are
19 humanitarian emergency response and relief centers.
20 They are not homeless shelters.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: What mechanisms are in
22 place could you share to ensure that asylum seekers
23 know that they have the option to bypass the HERRCs
24 system and utilize the shelter system?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: The whole purpose of the HERRCs is to figure out where people are going next. One of those destinations is the homeless shelter system so, by nature, the entire mission is organized around figuring out where they are going to go next, whether it's a homeless shelter, whether it's a family, whether it's reticketing to another place, that's the whole purpose of the organization that we're setting up.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Could you just add some clarity to the mechanism?

DR. LONG: Yeah. As part of case management, when we're asking you if there's any friends or family that you'd want to stay with inside of the city, outside of the city, we're also going to talk to you about shelters because if you tell us on day one that the place where you want to be is within our excellent shelter system in New York City you don't need to wait four days. The 96 hours, what I said earlier we want to make sure we give ourselves plenty of time to do everything we can to help you to reach those family members, if we can find out where you want to go in one day, whether it's to a family member or it's into our shelter system, we'll get you

there that day, we'll get you there the following day. You don't need to stay in the humanitarian centers for any amount of time so that's going to be a key part of our discussion with all the individuals and families that are coming into our city because our goal is to get you where you want to be.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood. If a person at a HERRC decides they want to leave the HERRC, how are they logistically being transferred to the DHS system?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: By shuttle vans.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: By vans?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Who are they communicating with, like give us a picture of what it's looking like on the ground.

DR. LONG: I'll start and then actually this is a good example because what I'm going to say is we do a warm handoff to DHS. Once we identify that where somebody wants to be is within our shelter system, the mechanism will be in a van but we'll have a warm handoff in coordination with our DHS shelter system so that when they're going to the intake

center they'll know they're coming, that sort of thing, and Molly can share more about how the warm handoff is going to work.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: DHS is standing up a centralized intake site for asylum seekers. What has been happening thus far is that families are going to our traditional family intake site in the Bronx, single adult men go to 30th Street, so on, what we are doing is consolidating all of that for the asylum seekers so we will have one location, we will have staff that are specialized in working with the asylee population. We will build relationships between the on-the-ground staff at the HERRC and at the sanctuary intake site so that we are able to plan for who is coming in, do the very basic shelter intake, we streamlined that because we are getting information, facilitate those family reunifications that I mentioned because right now those are happening on a very retailed basis, they are challenging, a lot of families are here without phones so we are sort of patching that together so the information shared will help us do that and then be able to make a placement within the DHS shelter system.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I'm assuming that this mechanism, like there's this warm handoff, this is language accessible, there are folks who are speaking in the languages comfortable by our asylum seekers. Could you share a little bit more about how staff is going to be trained to provide compassionate care?

DR. LONG: I'll speak on the humanitarian center side and then I'll turn to Molly to speak more on the DHS side. Language access is crucially important, and I say this as a primary care doctor myself. One of the things that makes me proud to work in New York City Health and Hospitals is I have patients that speak tens of languages where I practice in the Bronx, our Language Line for Health and Hospitals has over 250 languages and dialects that it offers interpretation for. We're going to be offering 240 languages and dialects through our interpreter service that we're going to have at the humanitarian centers, but that's only a piece of it. We are looking to again work with our community-based organization partners who also speak the languages of their communities, of the people coming to seek asylum. We're setting the goal of having 85 percent of our vendor staff that we are bringing on to be

bilingual and we're going to have interpreters on site, we're going to have sign language capability as well. We really want to make sure that there's barriers to people feeling comfortable and being able to have, to use the Speaker's words again, an effective experience to let us help them get where they need to go. In terms of making sure that we're meeting them where they are too, just to say a couple words about mental health because it goes hand in hand, when you come through the front door we want to be able to speak with you in your preferred language but we also want to be able to identify everything that you've been through so we're also not only making sure that our staff are bilingual with interpretation services but also we're training our staff in mental health first aid so that we can identify, and again this is what we do on the healthcare side, we want to be able to identify who is not just in a mental health crisis but who is suffering from a mental health issue that we can begin to address there and bridge them into wherever they need to be so we're going to be training our staff in mental health first aid, we're going to be training our staff in trauma-informed care, we're

even doing a special training this next week starting at the Navigation Center, (INAUDIBLE) New York City, we're proud to take care of people that have survived torture at Bellevue and Libertas Clinic at Elmhurst, we've offered this care for years. The leaders of those clinics are going to specifically come to train our staff to make sure that we can offer that sort of training in compassionate care wherever we are, which includes our Centers. Finally, we are going to make sure that when you come through the front door as we're speaking to you in your preferred language, as we're seeing what you need from a mental health perspective, that we are going to be able to connect you with NYC Well as well which is something we have uniquely in New York City where we can actually have you speak with a mental health professional almost instantly, either on your phone and we'll be providing wi-fi or we'll have iPads and phones there as well.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you. DHS places a similar premium on language accessibility. Many of our DHS staff and provider staff are bilingual but, recognizing the really unprecedented nature, we've done an 8.2 million dollar emergency

solicitation for enhanced interpretation services and are deploying interpreters to critical sites to make sure that we are meeting people's language access needs. We do use the Language Line as well to be able to serve specialized dialects or if there isn't somebody available at the point in time, recognizing that we're a high volume and 24/7 operation so really a premium there.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I'll come back to some more questions around mental health services, but on the language access services, 8.2 million dollars. Could you share how that's being allocated, how it's going to get spent?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: We're actually really trying to be as nimble as possible. Actually, the landscape of the universe of people we are serving now looks different than it did even when we put the solicitation out a few weeks ago. I think the last time that we testified here, we were saying 100 asylum seekers a day coming in the system. It's now more like 300 to 500 people a day so we are identifying the sites with the highest demand, which certainly is intake, but also the shelters that have the highest population of asylees, so we are

deploying the interpretation services as needed but, again, really trying to be nimble.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: For the providers, let's say like the people doing the interpreting, these are paid folks?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay. Can the administration guarantee that nobody will be held at a HERRC overnight when they made it clear that they prefer to utilize the shelter system?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: That's the intent, yes.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: We'll hold you to that. Can you guarantee that nobody will be referred to the HERRC from a shelter intake or other DSS/DHS facility?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I think there could be unique circumstances where somebody is in a DHS shelter and needs to be reticketed, but that's not the intent. Again, I think one of the things that I just want to emphasize here is this is an unprecedented humanitarian crisis...

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Totally.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: And that there's a lot that we don't know and there's a lot that we're going to learn and there are going to be things that we have to adjust on the fly based on a lot of things that are outside of our control, but the intent is that this is a one-way street from the HERRC to the shelter system and not from the shelter system back to the HERRC.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: What will you do to prevent that where somebody at a DHS facility is being taken...

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I mean it would have to be something wildly outside of our control where that occurs. This is not something that we are intending to do, and DHS has a lot of their own capabilities to do some of this work on their own.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay. I want to give an opportunity to my Colleagues for some questions. Council Member Gutierrez.

COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIERREZ: Thank you, Chair Hanif. Several questions so I'm just going to try to read them through. My first question is how soon after a new neighbor arrives and you realize you

need to connect them to legal services, what is that gap between the time they get to Port Authority, or in this instance, Orchard Beach, how many hours between their arrival are they connected to specifically immigration legal services?

DR. LONG: When they get to our humanitarian center, we're going to be providing them legal information from the outset. If there are identified needs or if they wish to speak with a lawyer, we do have legal services that we provide at our Navigation Center, and, to be clear, our Navigation Center both for individuals and families staying at our humanitarian centers or for individuals and families in our DHS shelters, the Navigation Center will still continue to exist and provide all of the services it currently does.

COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIERREZ: The services are not necessarily brought to them after you give them the information? It's then up to that person to then locate where these services are?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: If they wish to speak with one of the lawyers at the Navigation Center, as Commissioner Castro said earlier, there is an appointment-based system for getting them into the

Navigation Center and same is true for anybody in a DHS shelter as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIERREZ: Can I assume that the appointments are being facilitated by some of the staff at these Centers? I don't want to assume they have internet connection or a phone nonetheless.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yes, your assumption is very safe. That will be provided by our staff. In addition to that, we will have wi-fi.

COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIERREZ: Perfect. This is for Commissioner Castro. Has the City been thinking long-term on the realities of eligibility for some of these folks? I've worked in immigration before. Asylum is incredibly difficult to secure. I know that you are making strides in trying to expedite, just even being able to have some of these folks secure working papers, but in those instances, not everyone is necessarily coming from Venezuela and I know people have very different reasons for migrating, have you all thought about what is the long-term plan for some of these folks, how can we keep them safe, how can we continue to connect them to resources in those instances where they don't qualify?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes and thank you so much for that question because it's a really important issue for us. We've been thinking about this before asylum seekers started to arrive in the city. As you probably know, the federal government does not provide legal representation for immigrants arriving to our country and so they are left to rely on themselves and local governments who do provided resources. New York City happens to be the city government that provides the most resources when it comes to immigration legal services, and there will be several touchpoints at which asylum seekers will be able to connect with legal support, but the reality is that with tens of thousands of asylum seekers arriving who will need legal assistance, we might not even have enough lawyers to be able to work with each of them in their particular cases. As you mentioned, asylum-seeking cases can take years and are incredibly difficult to work on, but we're committed to meeting the most immediate needs of asylum seekers as they arrive which is an orientation of what the asylum-seeking process is and how to go about applying for work permits and connecting with

legal services in our city available to all immigrants here.

COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIERREZ: Can I ask you, Commissioner, just a specific question about folks? Specific that are arriving from Venezuela who have no consulate here that may have lost documentation along the way, what is the best way or what is a pathway for folks to retain some of the identification documents that they're going to need to even begin an asylum case? What are some of the things that we can do in our districts, but what are some of the ways that we can also help you in doing that job? It's specifically for folks from Venezuela. It's incredibly difficult for them to retain some of these documents.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, and we thank City Council Members, Council Member Brewer, for their advocacy with our federal government to support asylum seekers, be able to get expedited work permits for instance. It'll take a whole lot of advocacy at the federal level to make sure that asylum seekers from Venezuela for instance or other countries where there are not enough resources here to get their documentation, but at the border they do get

documents that they can use to travel with in the country and to support them in their immigration processes. One of the first things we did, because we realized people's documents were being taken at the border, is work with ID NYC to accept those documents as points to be able to process their ID NYC.

COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIERREZ: Thank you. I have one question for Commissioner Iscol. With the announcement from the administration for PEGs and you mentioned earlier that the idea is to flush the tent situation at Orchard with hundreds of employees. Where do you see that trade-off happening? For example, in my District my emergency shelter has had a really difficult time employing folks and employing folks that either speak another language or can provide these services so where is the pathway for your agency there to be able to take in hundreds of new staff members to be able to serve folks and how do you see the trade-off happening with proposed cuts that this administration is pushing every agency to make?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yes. These are being done largely under contracts with some additional support from the National Guard, from

Health and Hospitals, from community-based organizations, but I think if your question is specifically about the funding for this, is that what I'm understanding?

COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIERREZ: I'm curious about the funding and what the plan is to employ hundreds of people at one time to be able to do these services.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: That is largely being done through the contractors that are providing most of the services there. They're doing the hiring. We have a staffing contract. We have a building and maintenance contract, but also in terms of the funding there's a lot of conversations that have been taking place at the state and the federal government around funding.

COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIERREZ: The cost, can you share what you all are anticipating for these contracts?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: We're still sort of analyzing the cost but happy to get something to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER GUTIERREZ: Okay. My last question, Chair, I promise. I have a keen curiosity

in connectivity in some of the centers. I also, when you say Language Line, we had a whole joint hearing here at the City Council about some of the shortfalls of Language Line so I'm curious, and I heard firsthand from a lot of medical professionals saying that they have to use their own cell phones because there are bad spots in the hospitals that they're serving patients in so I'm curious if you have all kind of figured out connectivity in Orchard Beach, for example, or any of these new locations that you're looking at, kind of where is the priority level there? If the only thing you are using is Language Line, which is not perfect, what is that process for you all to ensure that there are no weak spots, that we will not have people who just cannot be connected to Language Line because there is poor connectivity in these temporary locations?

DR. LONG: I want to start with saying I think you bring up a really important point that Language Line serves a purpose, but having an in-person interpreter for many people is a preferred option so we are going to have in-person interpreters at our Humanitarian Center. For those that speak different languages that we don't have in-person

1 interpreters for or bilingual staff for because,
2 again, that's a very important emphasis for us as
3 well, New York City Health and Hospitals have used
4 Language Line for many years. I have a patient that I
5 see in the Bronx. She speaks an uncommon dialect.
6 She's from Africa. She always smiles when she sees me
7 because then she says as soon as I get Language Line
8 up and running that we're the only people she can
9 talk to so we have a lot of experience using Language
10 Line. For anybody who would prefer to have an in-
11 person interpreter or a bilingual staff member, that
12 will be an option, but we are going to be sure we set
13 up Language Line as we've seen it succeed in our 11
14 hospitals and 57 community health centers for many
15 years at New York City Health and Hospitals.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much.
18 I'll now pass it to Council Member De La Rosa
19 followed by Council Member Brewer. You have three
20 minutes, but there will be a second round.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you. Let
22 me just say as the Civil Service and Labor Chair, we
23 just had a hearing on the municipal workforce and we
24 understand how stretched most of the agencies have
25 more than 5 percent vacancy rates, and I'm concerned

about how we continue to do and manage through this crisis with proposed PEGs so do you see the proposed PEGs as a barrier to you being able to serve our new neighbors?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: No.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Are you sure? I know you're not supposed to ask us for more money, but are you sure you're going to be able to carry out the services...

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: We at Emergency Management don't get to pick the emergencies. We have to respond to them, and we have to meet the need and we will.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: All right. We look forward to having that conversation because from the conversation we had last week at the Civil Service and Labor Committee, it seems like we are at a crisis point with the municipal workforce and I can probably guarantee you that most of your staff members in your agencies have been working indescribable hours, even though they won't say that on the record.

I also have a question as far as the intake process. There are obstacles that exist with

the DHS intake process for documentation. One of the things we've been hearing from our providers about is that, for example, if people want to be considered a couple and go to a family shelter they have to be married or in a domestic partnership, and it is incredibly difficult for these people to have their partners, they come from another country here, they have no documents to go through the process of being in a domestic partnership in order to qualify. Is there any exceptions to the rules that can be made for some of the traditional intake processes? For example, there's also a question about whether these people can provide a list of where they've lived before. That's a common question in the intake process. Are any of those things being taken away in this scenario?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Thank you for that question. For families, both families with children and adult families, what traditionally happens is somebody comes into intake, they are given a conditional placement and then there is an eligibility review. What we have been doing for the families who are asylum seekers is people are remaining in that conditional status for right now,

understanding that they cannot provide all of that same documentation and that the eligibility process doesn't apply. As we are standing up this separate intake site that I referenced earlier, we will have a streamlined and somewhat different intake, recognizing again to your point that we cannot request all of the same documentation and housing history for people who are coming from out of the country.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: So if they are not in a domestic partnership, are they being required to be in a domestic partnership and does that include LGBTQ+ couples?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Right now, people are staying in these conditional placements so they are in shelter. We are neither finding them eligible nor ineligible, and we are working with them. In many cases, actually people are getting domestic partnerships.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: I know. The non-profits are helping them through those processes, but they should be exempt from having to do that in order to get shelter.

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: For this
3 standalone asylum intake site, we are going to have
4 streamlined rules with lower documentation
5 requirements, yes.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Okay. If you
7 could update us on when that comes to fruition
8 because they're here now, and they have had to go
9 through this process.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Nobody is being
11 found ineligible for lack of documentation right now,
12 but we are launching that streamlined intake site as
13 of today. We are starting small so people are still
14 going through traditional intake sites, but we should
15 be fully up and running there by mid-October.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Final
17 question. Following up Chair Hanif's line of
18 questioning, is there a script that staff are being
19 trained when a person is taken to the Orchard Beach
20 site? Is there a script that staff is being trained
21 on to inform people that they can reject staying in
22 the HERRC, and do you have what that script looks
23 like?

24 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Yes, and just
25 to be really on it because this is an important

2 point, if you want to go into our excellent DHS
3 shelter system, we...

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: They're not
5 excellent.

6 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: We want to get
7 you where you want to go, and if it's that day you
8 tell us where you want to go then there's no reason
9 for you to stay in the HERRC any longer than you wish
10 to so the answer to your question is will staff be
11 trained to let people know what their options are and
12 that they could select to go into one of our DHS
13 shelters as quickly as they wish to, the answer is
14 yes.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Council Member Brewer.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you and
17 thank you for all your hard work. I'm always focused,
18 as you know, on the working paper so I guess I know
19 that the Mayor has tried, the Governor has tried,
20 supposedly our delegation has tried, I want to get an
21 update and then I want to understand, I think it's
22 great that people can get the municipal ID, what does
23 that get you, and then since I'm like a broken record
24 on this topic people say well, Gale, why don't you
25 use the paid internship because sometimes you don't

need working papers, they have parole status, they can work, paid internship might give them the ability to be able to work. I don't know about paid internships. I'm just trying everything to get these amazingly talented individuals working, and I can't take any more calls of people asking me, I have jobs, so can you help me with the ID? Does that get you anything while we're waiting for the feds? Do we need an act of Congress to get the working papers? Somebody said the Ukrainians got an act of Congress. We need an act of Congress now. It's very mysterious. Go ahead.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We're fully in agreement with, Council Member, and our team at Federal Legislative Affairs is in D.C. working with the White House..

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: (INAUDIBLE) working hard. I know.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: As you know, we're working with a Congressional delegation to see what options we have. Unfortunately, asylum seekers cannot use ID NYC as work papers.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's what I thought.

2 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: What I could say is
3 that we have a tremendous group of non-profit
4 organizations that work with asylum seekers and other
5 immigrants with informal sector work like day
6 laborers and domestic workers, and asylum seekers are
7 going to these agencies like NICE and Mixteca and
8 others, and they've received assistance there to get
9 health and safety training and so on to be able to
10 connect with work.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know that. I'm
12 just trying to get to the next step. What's with this
13 paid internship? Does anybody know anything about
14 that or was that just Jose Ortiz, Jr.?

15 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We have an upcoming
16 meeting with Jose Monday...

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: My understanding
18 is paid internship you can get without the working
19 papers so Jose needs to get on that.

20 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes. We have an
21 interagency meeting with Jose on Monday to discuss
22 our options.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'll call him this
24 weekend and tell him. Next, is the faith-based. I'm
25 focused on these churches, synagogues, and mosques.

They all have space, nobody goes to church anymore in case you don't know, and so there's just tons of space. The Catholics, the Episcopalians, they've all got space, but they need showers so you have to bring the truck from Brooklyn with the showers. They have kitchens and they have bathrooms so I'm trying to figure out, St. John has got space, St. Gregory has got space, I got all the saints, they all got space. What are we doing to get that space?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Council Member Brewer...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know. We've had this conversation but for everybody else.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: One of the things that I love talking about is that you always have a lot of work for us to do. I always get a list of items to do when I have the opportunity to chat with you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Oh god, I saw him last night at an event and I started up.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: She did, and we are going to start looking at those spaces and we'll see if we can make them work...

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, a list
3 apparently has been sent from a couple of different
4 faith-based organizations so I'll make sure you get
5 both of them. They want to help their community and
6 then you'd have all your problems really addressed.

7 Next is storage at the Port Authority.
8 Ruth Messinger calls me every minute about some
9 storage room. Do I need to call Rick Cotton to get
10 the storage room?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: We have a
12 storage room at Port Authority now.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: You do? So how
14 come she called me like five minutes ago and asks me
15 about, could you please tell her that you have a
16 storage room?

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I will put it
18 on my Gale Brewer to-do list.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. Okay.
20 LGBTQ, when I spoke yesterday to, I mean Covenant
21 House is trying, when I spoke to the city they said
22 there were a couple of other places but there are a
23 lot of young people who need support. What are we
24 doing with that community to support them? It's a
25 very special community, young, LGBTQ or anybody, but

they're very special and it's hard. Any suggestions for that community?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I'll say that our team at Health and Hospitals has been doing a tremendous job at checking off things on our wish list for the humanitarian centers, one of which is really providing assistance to LGBTQ communities in a way that provides extensive case management to connect them to appropriate shelters and services. This is why we want to move to this humanitarian center strategy that allows us to provide more resources.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, but what are we doing now with the LGBTQ?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: I can chime in. I think this is an example of the interagency partnership that has been going on because the teams that have been meeting individuals at the Port Authority are really proactive about flagging people with a variety of particular needs but including LGBTQ individuals and then DHS works to make sure that we are getting an appropriate placement. As you know, we have some LGBTQ-specific shelters. We are using those as appropriate.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I think they're all full, Molly. They're all full.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Sometimes there are vacancies. We are using those vacancies where appropriate if people have particular safety needs, making sure that we're accommodating with a single or a double room.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'll let you know out there in the buzz world, it's a big issue. People are asking me why isn't more being done. Just so you're aware of it. That is such a special community. You don't want them to get bullied, you don't want them to get hurt, and you need to pay particular attention to them.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Appreciate that feedback. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Finally, the Mexican food is too spicy. They want Venezuelan food. I'm not kidding. Are you aware of that?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I know you're not kidding. Do you want to speak to the menu and also some of the work we're doing at the HERRC for the LGBTQ community?

DR. LONG: To go with the latter question first. We have designed a menu which, and you can give us feedback once the humanitarian center actually opens if you're getting feedback that it's still spicy, but we've designed it to be a South American diet with, again, multiple options, three hot meals a day in a dining hall so you can reconnect with people around you.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's happening now?

DR. LONG: No...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It will happen?

DR. LONG: Yeah, so when we open the humanitarian center...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I will let you know when the complaints have stopped. Just finally, I know this whole issue you can't tell people that there's a shelter coming to their neighborhood, blah, blah, blah, I got it. Guess what happens? People find out, elected officials don't know, there's drama. Everybody wants to help. I wish they helped New Yorkers. That's another whole story, but they do want to help asylum so it would be helpful because if you could tell the community they're coming, this is the

shelter, it's from the asylum, can you help. It's a suggestion. I mean if you put New Yorkers in your neighborhood, they all start screaming, but everybody loves the asylum so help because then...

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: We have opened 39 emergency sites since the middle of June. We are doing what we can to give advanced notice. I will say we are moving extremely quickly...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But we move fast too.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Absolutely. I am well aware that some of those notifications have happened day of. It is not an attempt to hide information. It is because we are moving as fast as we possibly can to keep up with the demand.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Molly, the agencies are afraid, they get afraid to call us because they're going to get in trouble with their contract if they call elected officials so you just have to send them a note, everybody, it's okay to call your elected officials, it's okay to call the Community Board, shoes, clothes, pampers, diapers, all that stuff.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: I cannot stress enough though that we are moving just unbelievably quickly...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Tell the agencies it's okay to call. Thank you.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: A memo to that effect. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much, Council Member Brewer. Just to pick up on what Council Member De La Rosa asked about the script. I'm grateful to hear that there will be one. Can you commit to sharing that script with the Council?

DR. LONG: The trainings will have elements, they'll be an introductory script and then case management, as you well know, goes in different directions so we train our case managers as we do with our social workers to listen first and then see where the conversation goes. I'd be happy to commit to sharing with you the relevant sort of introductory parts of the script. I just want to make the point to set expectations that this is not a one-size-fits-all. Case management is really hard, and that's why we're setting up these centers.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: No, I understand that,
3 and sharing even just the preliminary would be great
4 for us.

5 DR. LONG: The introductory parts.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Introductory, yes. I'd
7 now like to go into learning a little bit more about
8 the vendor selection for the creation of the HERRC on
9 Orchard Beach. We had received information that the
10 vendor selected to construct and operate is SLSCO. Is
11 this true?

12 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: SLS is one of
13 two contractors that are working up there. They're
14 not the one doing the construction and maintenance of
15 the facility. They're doing a lot of the wraparound
16 services and augmenting and working the H and H team.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Who was contracted to
18 do the construction?

19 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: A company
20 called Garner.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Garner, and is this a
22 unionized vendor or are unions consulted?

23 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I can find out
24 and circle back with you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Could you just clarify a little bit more what SLSCO is going to be doing exactly?

DR. LONG: SLS is going to be helping us to run the facility's management of the site. I'll give some specific examples. Once again, you've come through. We've offered you initial comfort care. You started your case management work. We're going to have showers available for you. We're going to be providing towels. We're going to have everything in the showers you need. That needs to be maintained, cleaned. There's a body of work there. We're going to have a variety of services like we're going to have laundry service which includes a fluff and fold, just because you've come a long way, I don't want to diminish the importance of having clean clothes that you feel comfortable in so that's going to be something that we're offering there too, and then a variety of other services that are included in the operation of the center itself. Everything we do requires staff to do it, and the vendor, SLS, is focused on the staffing piece of providing the staff for a lot of the services like the ones I mentioned.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I'm asking specifically about SLS because this company received over 2 billion dollars to construct former President Trump's border wall, and it's pretty explicit on their website. This isn't like something they're hiding. Under projects, you can see that they've got several border walls that they've worked on. We should be working to build trust with asylum seekers, and the agreement to contract this particular company raises a lot of problems.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: SLS has also done a ton of work with us throughout COVID. They are one of the city's emergency contract providers for COVID. They ran many of our vaccination sites. They helped build a number of our COVID field hospitals. Their audit that the Comptroller did was a fantastic audit, and so it's one of the reasons that we were comfortable working with them for an emergency. As you know, with emergency contracts, it's a different contracting system than it is when you are going through the normal contract and procurement system, which because we are dealing with an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, we simply do not have time to go through the normal procurement process so we worked

2 with a vendor that we have been working with over the
3 last couple of years through COVID and that has
4 performed well under those contracts.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Did you all know that
6 this company had created walls across the southern...

7 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I was not
8 aware of that until I saw the report yesterday.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Will this revelation
10 end our relationship with this company?

11 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: It will not.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Why are we working
13 with a company that has profited from xenophobic
14 policies?

15 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: As I said,
16 this is also a company that the City has worked with
17 throughout COVID setting up vaccination sites,
18 running COVID field hospitals, and we have done
19 tremendous work with them in the past, and it's one
20 of the reasons we are comfortable working with that
21 company in this emergency as well where we have to
22 circumvent some of the procurement policies and
23 procedures that are usually in place for contracts.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I get that but,
3 Commissioner, does it not raise a problem to you that
4 this company has literally built...

5 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I'm not happy
6 about it, but I will also tell you as I said this is
7 an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. There's a lot
8 of things I'm not happy about, but that's the nature
9 of dealing with an emergency.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: On the construction
11 front, I know you're not sure if unionized labor was
12 contacted, but I'd be hopeful that...

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Again, I just
14 want to emphasize again that this is an emergency and
15 that there's a lot of things that we would normally
16 do if this was a normal process or we had time, but
17 this is an unprecedented humanitarian crisis that we
18 are dealing with.

19 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I get that, but I'm
20 not quite understanding why we won't use unionized
21 labor. Are you telling me there's issues...

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I will circle
23 back with you about Garner and SLS.

24 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay. I want to go
25 into understanding just some of the budgetary

questions that I think many of my Colleagues and I have. How much total funding is anticipated to support the newly arrived asylum seekers?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: We're still scoping that out and happy to get back to you with some of the numbers.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Do you have just a ballpark number?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I think there are some things that have already been doing through MOIA that you could speak to, right, with some of the legal services, Navigation Center?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: To operate the Navigation Center, we've invested 6.75 million. We've also issued an RFP for 5 million to expand legal services. That's more than any other city has done so I'm very proud of what we've been able to do and more is coming. We're going to continue to invest in services, and I think our OMB office will share a more detailed explanation of how much this will cost and we look forward to the federal and state governments to support in this process.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Absolutely. Any of the other agencies expenditure already or anticipated?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: I really don't have total figures given how rapidly we are expanding. I mentioned we have opened 39 emergency sites since June. Those are largely in commercial hotels. Commercial hotels are an expensive place to provide shelter simply because we are paying nightly hotel rates as well as paying for security, for food, for social services so this has been a very significant increase. It will result in what I would anticipate to be a very significant increase in the DHS budget in order to meet our legal and law mandate to provide shelter.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: You're unable to share any kind of specific numbers right now?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: It has been a very rapidly moving target given how quickly we have been adding sites so no, I don't have a cumulative target at this point, but we are working with the Office of Management and Budget, recognizing that this is a very significant hit to the DHS budget.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Can we receive just how much has been spent by agency up to date following this hearing?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Absolutely.

1 COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Could I get a yes or a
3 no from the other reps here?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Yes.

5 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RAMOS: Yes.

6 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SOOD: Yes.

7 DR. LONG: Yes.

8 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. I know
10 you're still scoping, but will this funding be
11 included in the November plan? Are there discussions
12 for the upcoming...

13 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: Discussions
14 are ongoing.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay. Can you list all
16 relevant state funding that the City has received up
17 to date?

18 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I cannot, but
19 what I can tell you is that we've had very active
20 conversations with our federal partners and our state
21 partners. They have expressed a willingness to help,
22 especially with finances, and we are going to hold
23 them at their word.

24 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: For NYCEM, zero at
25 this...

2 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I'd have to
3 get you a number. I don't know.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Any of the other
5 agencies?

6 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So far, as far as I
7 know, the City has covered all expenses related to
8 this humanitarian crisis. We're still awaiting word
9 from the federal and state governments.

10 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Families with
11 children shelter is traditionally claimed a portion
12 of that comes from the State, but the extent to which
13 we are going to be able to claim is going to depend
14 on individuals' immigration status so that is
15 something that we're going to have to work through at
16 a very detailed level with our State partners.

17 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: What I've been
18 told is we have gotten bus resources at the Port
19 Authority, MTA buses, to help transit people to
20 shelter system but that is it so far from the State.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: How much is that?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I don't know
23 what the MTA costs are, but it's generally two buses
24 a day. There are times where they give us more buses
25 based on the number of buses we're receiving from El

Paso or from Texas and based on also the time so there have been some times where we've gotten buses overnight where the MTA has had to step up and provide two additional buses.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay. Can the agency speak to any State funding that is pending?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I'm sorry. We also have a commitment for the National Guard as well that the State will be providing at least for the first 30 days.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Do you know the dollar amount for that?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I don't, but I can get that for you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. Thank you. For any State funding that's pending, I know National Guard, are there any agencies anticipating funding coming in?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: We hope.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Yeah, this is just to better understand how coordination has occurred, is occurring, and then because when I've talked about this and when I've heard Commissioners talk about this issue, we've talked about this coordinated

effort and so just trying to understand if any monetary support has been provided thus far.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: I think we can for all the agencies that there's really active conversations going on with our State partners. Exactly what form that looks like is still to be determined.

DR. LONG: I'll list three concrete ways that the State has helped us so far and we have had very productive and supportive conversations by the State, but the reason I think you're hearing a little bit of silence on the humanitarian center side is it hasn't opened yet so as we continue conversation as it actually opens then I think we'll be in a better position to answer your question.

Three concrete examples though are the buses that Commissioner Iscol is referring to, the National Guard, and even trailers on our sites that have a monetary value as well so the State's done a lot to support us so far but, as the center actually opens, that's where we're going to be able to better analyze the costs and better answer your question.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: I would also add we're not in a State budget season right now so I

think a lot of that will play out later in the year as the State is doing its next budget. It's just the wrong point in the season to be able to put specific numbers on that.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay. Can you talk about any relevant federal funding across other agencies?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: The federal government has the Emergency Food and Shelter Program that is run by FEMA. There hopefully will be a supplemental to provide additional funding for that. I believe Congressman Espaillat has been working on that, but that is the primary mechanism for fundings these types of operations.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Just to clarify, have we received that?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I believe we have received some funds in August. It's distributed quarterly, and it's based on reimbursements. It's not based on forward expenses or projections. I can get you the exact number of what we have received to date, and I think the next disbursement is at the end of October.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay. Great. That would be helpful to have. Any of the other agencies anticipating federal dollars or have you rejected federal dollars?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I can safely tell you we have not rejected any federal dollars.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: I was just going to add that the FEMA funds referenced were a multi-agency request so it reflected the spending from all of the agencies that had incurred cost but through June 30th because it is done on this quarterly basis so that was relatively early on in the emergence of the emergency so the numbers to date are going to be relatively small.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay. What's the cost associated with the current Navigation Center?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: As I said, 6.75 million to operate. That's through a contract with Catholic Charities. (INAUDIBLE) we will be granting to other non-profits across New York City to serve as satellite Navigation Centers, and we've entered into an agreement with the Red Cross to lease the space through 16 months.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So 6.7 million to Catholic Charities. How are they utilizing that?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: They're operating the Navigation Center by coordinating staffing and intake at the Navigation Center and convening many of our city agencies to be on site to provide support as well. They're going to be re-granting to a number of different non-profits which they will announce soon. That was included in their contract with us that they would do so that we are also expanding out to the five boroughs to make sure that people connect to the Navigation Center.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Is there a timeline for them to use the 6.7 million dollars by?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Through this Fiscal Year.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Through this Fiscal Year. Okay. What's the anticipated costs for future HERRCs?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: It depends on the location and the requirement so those are all things that we have to spec out and it's part of the assessment we have to make based on the locations

that we're looking at or the resource that we're looking at.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: What's it costing to build out the one on Orchard Beach?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I can get you the exact number.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Different sources estimated that it typically costs 135 dollars per day to house a single adult in a shelter, 190 dollars per day to house a family. What's the estimated cost per migrant in terms of staying at the centers and using services?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: I don't think it's apple to apples, and you have to remember that we're also seeing more numbers of people throughout that month and hopefully part of this process is that you are helping relocate people with families, friends, sponsors, or getting them to further destinations, and so it's apples to oranges, not apples to apples, but as we start to understand the cost better, and part of the reason for that is there's a lot we don't know so next week when we open we're going to start scaling our operations, we will figure out that there are some things that we need to

continue operating there, there are some things that are no longer needed there, there are some things that are needed but may be better served at the Navigation Center or elsewhere and so as we continue to build and learn we'll have a better sense of what those per person costs are over the first 24 hours or 96 hours and potentially also what some of the savings might be because we're helping people get to another destination.

DR. LONG: Just to add on there, I think one of the things that's different in terms of the unique needs of individuals and families coming into our city to seek asylum is they have different healthcare needs. Healthcare is a human right, and that is true. We make sure that they feel that is true at all of our sites so as we are thinking about their healthcare needs, we are going to be tailoring the services in a way that makes sense for the issues that they're presenting it so that makes it a little bit hard to compare to your statistic because we're going to be tailoring our healthcare needs, which we are doing now so we'll know more as we move forward.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great. I'll go into some questions about health. Are asylum seekers being screened for COVID-19 and monkeypox upon arrival?

DR. LONG: Just to back up for a second, this is one of the reasons why we're excited to raise our hand in New York City Health and Hospitals to help the people coming into our city seeking asylum is we know that there are going to be a lot of healthcare issues and we feel very proud and confident to be able to help them. When you come through into the center initially, we screen you for communicable diseases. That includes things like COVID, I also would say at New York City Health and Hospitals we've run New York City Test and Trace, now Treat Corps, for the last two and a half years, we've done millions of tests in thousands of locations, and we have unique models for instantly getting you access to Paxlovid if you have a positive COVID test and you're positive. All of that will be true there. Everybody is going to get a COVID test when they walk into the center for the first time. Anybody that is positive will go into an appropriate isolation part of the facility and anybody that's positive that's eligible will get Paxlovid 100 percent of the time.

Now, other communicable districts, for example, that we screen for are tuberculosis. Communicable diseases like MPV or monkeypox along with other ones, we elicit through asking you what your symptoms are so there's no test for somebody that doesn't have a rash for MPV for example so it's a little bit of a different process there, but we have a communicable disease medical screening process that everybody will go through including, again, COVID testing everybody.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Where are they receiving those vaccines?

DR. LONG: I'm sorry. The vaccines for?

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: For, if they are for COVID or any of the other sort of screenings that you're conducting.

DR. LONG: If somebody is screened and tests positive for COVID, they'll get treated for COVID instantly if they're eligible. We'll have clinicians on site, actually we'll have clinical teams on site 24/7 around the clock because of the people in the isolation part of the centers. We want to make sure everybody's safe at all times. Anybody that, again, is positive for COVID and is eligible

for treatment will get Paxlovid. Anybody that wishes to have a COVID vaccine, we currently offer an array of vaccines at our Navigation Center, and we're going to assess in this adult-only population what the need for vaccines are. One of the main reasons we've seen individuals and families needing vaccines coming into New York City is actually MMR. We take for granted hopefully everybody in this room has had an MMR vaccine. If you haven't, let me know. We'll get it for you today because everybody should have the MMR vaccine, but people coming from Venezuela, we've actually been giving out a fair amount of MMR but that's a requirement in order to get into our DOE schools so we see the need for that among children especially, but, of course, we will not have children at our first center so we want to make sure that we're tailoring the vaccines that we would have there to the needs of the population.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SOOD: Chair, if I could just add to build on what Dr. Long said about what's going on at the Navigation Center, there are certainly an array of medical services and vaccines being provided there, but what we are doing is connecting all individuals, adults and children, to

primary care appointments. A lot of these vaccines including some that Dr. Long started mentioned are multi-dose vaccines and so the goal is for people to be connected into healthcare services and primary care on an ongoing basis so that they can receive whether it's COVID, influenza, MMR, or other vaccines with a healthcare provider who's going to be their healthcare provider in the future.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great. The Navigation Center has sort of clinical setup for care and then the HERRC will also similarly have a clinic set up?

DR. LONG: Correct. I can go into a little more detail for you. Right now, we have clinical teams at Port Authority, but those clinical teams are doing medical triage. They're determining if you need to go to the emergency department or not, but we've seen several emergencies and we're very thankful that we've had teams there that can immediately get people where they need to be. We're also doing COVID testing at Port Authority.

At our Navigation Center, we're doing comprehensive assessments for children and families. We're doing three days of a variety of medications ranging from if you have an infection in your feet,

which we're seeing too often because of the travel over, we'll start you on antibiotics right there, or if you are out of your hypertension or diabetes medications, we can actually hand you several days as we connect you with a next-day primary care appointment of whatever medications you're on. We're seeing the need for that as well. We're also offering comprehensive vaccines ranging from COVID to flu to MMR to tetanus, you name it, at the Navigation Center today, and we're seeing which ones, like I said earlier, we're seeing a lot of need for MMR among children so we're doing that so that we can get the children coming into our city into our DOE schools as fast as possible.

At our Humanitarian Center, there's a medical screening process that happens when you come in that determines who needs to go into isolation and who doesn't and who needs to get treated immediately for COVID then we do a comprehensive assessment and we going to have the same ability to do three days of a variety of medications including antibiotics, including chronic disease medications, and a variety of other services.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Is COVID testing happening at Port Authority?

DR. LONG: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Could you share how it's happening? I've been there a couple times, but I saw the medical triage team and I spoke to some of those folks and they described exactly what you shared, but how's the COVID testing happening?

DR. LONG: For people that are coming in with symptoms. We're seeing about one out of five people coming into Port Authority has a cough or related symptoms so we are performing rapid antigen tests at Port Authority so that we can know immediately if individuals have COVID then we can take the appropriate action, which now would include through your New York City Test and Treat Corps connecting you instantly to treatment in a variety of ways.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: If I can chime in, for those who come to DHS shelter system and this is true for asylum seekers and/or anybody else, for those coming into the single adult system we're doing rapid PCR testing. That is across the board whether or not you are symptomatic.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. I want to know if for folks who are receiving any sort of care and then continued care for anybody coming in with an autoimmune disease, issues that require specialized attention, are we making sure that these folks have health insurance under the NYC Care? Walk me through that process.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SOOD: Thanks so much for that question, Chair. It's a very important one, and we're working really closely with Health and Hospitals certainly but also a lot of other partners in the city including Metro Plus and our own health insurance enrollers at the Health Department who are stationed at the Navigation Center doing health insurance enrollment. Certainly not everyone qualifies for health insurance, but what we do know is that we're lucky to live not just in New York City but in New York State where health insurance eligibility does include individuals who are largely in this population what's called Permanently Residing Under the Color of Law or PRUCOL, and the fact that many of these asylum seekers have been paroled into the country makes them eligible for health insurance so we are doing everything we can to enroll them into

health insurance. Sometimes it takes a few weeks for that eligibility to go into effect and for the health insurance to sort of become permanent, but, in the meantime, we're doing the direct connections to care and, as Dr. Long mentioned, a lot of times that's next day primary care appointments. For the individuals who are not eligible for health insurance, certainly they are being enrolled into NYC Care and getting a provider at Health and Hospitals.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's really great. We've talked in recent days about the young mother, the woman who died to suicide. What proactive resources are being provided to asylum seekers from the point of arrival to the shelter system, to the HERRC around their mental health protections, rights, services available?

DR. LONG: I'd love to start with that because as we've been working hard to design the new Humanitarian Center, the devastating event that you're referring to has been on the front of all of our minds, and mental health needs to be a cornerstone of everything that we do. People have gone through many times hell to get here, but now that they're here we want to make sure we take the

best care of them. I'm going to restate a couple of the things I shared earlier but then happy to go into more detail as well.

When you come into our center, we want to make sure that the staff that are immediately seeing you have mental health training. That's done best with something called mental health first aid. That enables our staff to identify again not just who's in crisis but who could have mental health issues and have brief interventions. We also want to make sure that our staff are trained in trauma-informed care in a special training as well from our Survivors of Torture Clinic so that we can make sure that whatever people are going through we can identify it quickly and get them connected to, based on whatever their condition is, wherever they need to go which could be one of our Survivors of Torture Clinics, again at Bellevue Hospital and at Elmhurst Hospital. The other thing which we wanted to make sure was available at the new center for everybody coming through the doors as well is if we've identified that you're depressed or you have anxiety, if you have a phone, we are going to give you a brochure about how to use our free wi-fi service to connect to NYC Well, and Rishi

can share more about that in a moment. We also provide phones and iPads if that's a better way for you to connect with NYC Well which is a unique New York City program to give you instant access to be able to talk to a mental health professional that can help you to work through however you're feeling in that very moment. You don't have to wait for an appointment. In addition to that, as Rishi was saying earlier too, if we're identifying problems, mental health and other, we've built pathways within our system to give you expedited access to care as well. We've reserved templates for people to come into our clinics so that we can connect them to primary care first and that's your doorway to getting connected to everything else that you would need. I think it's just important to state that with the trainings that I was referencing, if we're not doing the trainings we're not going to identify the problems and we're not going to be able to help and that's why it's so important to us.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Are you able to share how many folks are receiving either therapy or mental health care through NYC Well or counseling?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SOOD: I don't have numbers on that right now, Chair, but we can certainly follow up on that. I do want to just highlight that this is a very, very significant issue in terms of the number of people, unsurprisingly given the journey and the trauma that they have gone through, and so that's why we are providing psychological first aid and emotional support at the Navigation Center itself, not just actually to the asylum seekers but also to the staff working there. The staff working at the Navigation Center, the city staff, the other staff are doing really, really hard work, and they also need psychological first aid and mental health support so I agree with everything Dr. Long highlighted and I just want to reiterate that all of us at the Health Department are deeply saddened by the loss and thank you for bringing that up because to us it's a reminder of the obligation that we have, not just at the Health Department but across the city, to do everything we can in our power to protect not just the physical health but also the mental health of all of the asylum seekers.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Sure. I can speak to the process at DHS. Families with children,

at the PATH Intake Center, there is a healthcare provider there who's doing an initial assessment within the families with children system. There are case workers and social workers at all of our standard shelters. For single adults, they come in. At intake, there's some initial medical triage but then individuals go through a three-week assessment process that includes comprehensive medical screenings including both physical and behavioral health needs and for individuals in the single adult system who present with particular mental health needs they may be referred to a mental health shelter across the board. Whether we are talking about single adults or families with children, there's a real emphasis with our shelter providers on making sure that they are doing referrals to care in the community. We want people to be connected to medical professionals that they can work with over a long period of time and for everybody in shelter the goal is permanent housing so we don't want the medical care necessarily to be shelter-based because we want people to be able to maintain continuity of care when they exit. I will say with the 39 emergency sites that I've referenced a couple of times, we have stood

those up very quickly. We are rolling on staffing so there is basic staffing there, and we will be getting to the level of staffing that (INAUDIBLE) but that is a work in progress.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. I'll pass it to Council Member De La Rosa.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you so much, Chair. I actually do have a question about the hotels that have been turned into emergency shelters. At what point do the operators that have been chosen by the City come in to those shelters?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: We are working with the not-for-profits that have been selected as providers to take over operations as quickly as possible. We think they are the best equipped to do it, but we also want to make sure that they have sufficient staff to be able to do it so it depends a little bit on the organization. Some of the not-for-profits are very large organizations with really robust staffing operations (INAUDIBLE) the ability to redeploy from elsewhere in their organization, they're taking over very quickly. Some of the smaller organizations, they need a little bit more ramp up time. What we are doing in the interim is staffing

with a combination of DHS and HRA staff working overtime, really doing everything we can and some temp staff as well. We are moving very quickly as I've said a number of times, but the goal is to have the providers take over. The sites that we opened early on, the providers have been taking over, and we've been rolling the temp staff and the redeployed agency folks to the new facilities.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: At what point, if the operator is unable to fulfil the commitments of a contract or is just overwhelmed with how many shelters are popping up across the city, at what point are the agencies, the administration, reconsidering the contracts?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: We haven't gotten to that point yet. What we are doing, as I said, is really bridging with the agency and the temp staff until they can get there. If we got to a point where a not-for-profit raised their hand and said I can't do it or we say it's been going on too long, you're not going to be able to do it, then we would look to assign the contract to somebody else.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Right now, is there an acceptable time period where DHS or any

other agency is willing to step in for that operator until they can get staffing squared away?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: We really haven't put a hard and fast line on it because, again, we're working with providers that are massive, thousands of people, organizations and some that are very small, and we want to have that full range of providers there. It is such a tremendous need that we are really looking for all of our providers to step up, and we have gotten a tremendous response. We really are so grateful to our provider community.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Yes, I agree with you that our non-profit providers have been stepping up. Because of that, my next question is is there a plan to reimburse some of the non-profits that haven't been chosen to operate or have contracts with the City that have been putting forth staff to feed people, to transport people, to offer interpretation services, and have just been stepping up because they understand the unique needs of this community?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Our ability to make payments depends on contracts, but, if there are particular organizations, happy to dig in with you.

We certainly don't want to leave anybody carrying the water for the City.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you. My last question is around the Department of Education and funding for the new matriculated students who have been entering our districts. I know that there is a policy that after a certain date in October, I can't remember if the date is 15th or 30th...

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: 31.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: 31. There you go, Gale. 31, schools are no longer reimbursed. With the uptick in newly arrived students, is that policy being reconsidered and, if not, how are we paying schools to provide adequate services, meals, wraparound services to these new students.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RAMOS: Thank you for your question, Council Member De La Rosa. I will go back and have an extensive conversation with our Budget team, but you are correct. It is October 31st, and so as students trickle into our schools, trickle is an understatement at this point, the schools are being funded for the increase in enrollment. We also have an escalation system in process so that way schools that have 15 or more students in a given

grade or they have an additional need for an English as a new language teacher or a bilingual teach, we're escalating those concerns. To your point about October 31st quickly approaching, we will have conversations with the Budget team around what are our possibilities, and I also know that we are starting our conversations with the State in terms of additional funding, but we will get back to you.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Yeah, if you could get back to the Council on that and then also around if a child is then moved, if they move from one shelter to another type of shelter and that switch happens after this deadline, what occurs?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR RAMOS: That's an excellent question. To be clear, because of McKinney-Vento, they have the right to stay in their school should they choose. If a transfer occurs, then I can get back to you on exactly what happens with funding.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much. The latest Mayor's Management Report shows that in Fiscal Year '22 placements from shelter into permanent housing are down and average length of stay in shelters is up relative to Fiscal Year '21. This dynamic is exacerbating the bed shortage. We need

more people into permanent housing. I also want to note that the average shelter cost for a family with children is 180 dollars per day. A CityFHEPS rental assistance voucher for that same family costs 72 dollars per day so this is an economic imperative as well as a moral one. Will the administration lift or revise the 90-day rule that requires people to stay in a shelter for 90 days before becoming eligible for CityFHEPS?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: It's something that we are having active conversations with a variety of partners about. There are some real reasons why that is in place, but we understand the concern and it is something that we're looking at. A couple of notes on the statistics that you mentioned. For FY-22, the population in shelter, the shelter census was down, certainly not where we are right now, but at the end of the Fiscal Year we actually were at a relatively low census so part of the reason that the number of placements was done is because the number of people to place was down. I am the biggest cheerleader you will find for permanent housing. Permanent housing is a huge priority for the agency, but I think there are some complicated ways for

interpreting that data that I just wanted to put out. Similar on the length of stay, but I know that's not the topic of this hearing but happy to follow up.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Sure. Thank you. I'm grateful to know that this is being reconsidered or that active conversations are being had about this sort of prohibitive 90-day rule while I understand the challenges as well.

Are asylum seekers and other non-citizens eligible for CityFHEPS?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Generally, no. However, there's a lot of nuance to that answer. It really depends on where you are in the asylum process and a lot of very specific nuances around a given family's status so we are working right now to make guidance that is as transparent as possible for the shelter staff to inform when a household might be eligible but also recognizing that this is something that we are going to need to collaborate with others to be able to provide legal assistance given how often the answer is frankly it depends. In general, it is not legal for the City to spend ongoing funds on those who are undocumented. Again, asylum, that's where you get to the it depends answer, but it would

require State legislation for us to be able to provide CityFHEPS to those who are undocumented.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I know that non-citizens are eligible for a number of city benefits and then State law authorizing CityFHEPS doesn't include any immigration restrictions?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: The caveat that I am not an immigration attorney here, but we are not legally allowed to provide CityFHEPS to those who are undocumented. Again, there are some exceptions around particular asylee statuses, which is why there actually really does need to be a lot of case-by-case analysis done, but in most cases in order to be able to pay ongoing rental assistance, even using city tax levy dollars, it requires State legislation.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Can the administration commit to endorsing the legislation that would make this change at the State level?

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: It's been on our legislative agenda for several years.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great, so I'll take that as a yes.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER PARK: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. I want to now go into understanding how legal services are being addressed. Commissioner Castro, could you describe the scope of legal services envisioned in the Request for Proposals and are legal service providers being asked to scale back or limit the scope of their services at this time?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: In the 5 million Request for Proposals that I mentioned earlier, we asked for those agencies proposing to work with us on figuring out how to provide the most assistance to as many asylum seekers as possible. As you know, over 15,000 asylum seekers have arrived, and they'll require some level of legal assistance or orientation as mentioned. In fact, this is a good segue because asylum seekers currently are seeking asylum. They're not currently asylees. They'll have to engage in that process which can be quite a difficult process, and so we're looking for legal providers to be able to do that, both at the Navigation Center and elsewhere and so the RFP is looking for those kinds of proposals. We just began the process. Human Resources Administration is pulling together a team to evaluate

the applications that were received to then select a provider for that.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I've heard that at 20,000, when we reach that amount which we're very close to doing so, this comes to only 250 dollars per migrant if we keep to the 5 million and that the minimum needed for adequate representation is probably four times this amount, and I've talked to several providers who have shared just how arduous the process of the asylum application is and needing sort of long-term legal support system to get that done. How is the 5 million determined?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: The reality is that it's going to take perhaps hundreds of millions of dollars to be able to provide full legal representation to all the asylum seekers that have arrived and will continue to arrive and immigrant communities who are already in New York. As I mentioned earlier, the problem is that the federal government does not provide legal representation for immigrants arriving into the country, leaving that up to the individuals to figure out legal representation. In localities like New York City, we've invested historic numbers, and we're at a

historic amount of money invested in legal services in the city. We're looking for the State to also supplement this and our federal partners to work with us to figure out a solution to this issue because people will need support and, as you mentioned, it's an incredibly arduous process. We want people to get at the very least access to their work permits and for that they'll need assistance.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So far, how many bids were submitted?

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I'll have to get back to you on that. HRA is administering this contract, and they're managing the entire process including the administration of the bids and selection of that.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Do you know about any protest letters or no bid responses that were submitted, or is that also something that you'll have to have HRA...

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: That's being managed by HRA. In fact, I'm not even on the selection committee.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Interesting. Okay. That's quite interesting. The work described in the Request for Proposals requires collaboration across

multiple providers. Will MOIA consider amending the Request for Proposals to allow for multiple providers to collaborate to meet the requirements of the Request for Proposals?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I'll have to get back to you on that, but my understanding is that the way that this was crafted by HRA and (INAUDIBLE) it allows people to submit applications, proposals with multiple agencies. As we did with the Request for Proposals on the Navigation Center, we're looking to work with one provider who can work with then many folks who they then re-grant to.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: What is the long-term plan for providing representation to these individuals?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Again, because we're dealing with an unprecedented moment, a humanitarian challenge, and the numbers continue to grow, we'll continue to look and adjust. The reality is that about a month and a half ago, two months ago we were talking about one or two buses every other day and now we're talking about upwards of nine buses per day so we'll continue to look at the resources available and what we can do for people.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. Have you contacted the bar associations, law schools, large private law firms for additional support?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, in fact, we're looking at every possible way to provide support to asylum seekers. I've personally met with a number of legal service providers that work with volunteers including the bar, including a group called VOLS, Volunteers of Legal Services, who've used very innovative ways to scale up their services. Reality though is that we're talking about thousands of people and possibly tens of thousands of people by the end of the year, and it's a challenge. We're committed to working through this with our non-profit partners.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. Can you confirm that the administration won't be pulling from other funding streams like Adult Literacy or any other initiatives to fund these emergency procurements?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I don't believe that that's what we're doing. I'll have to get back to you. I'll have to speak with OMB about this, but as

far as my discussions we are not considering any of that.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Yeah, that would be quite devastating to some of the other initiatives that we are fully funding or trying to baseline fund. I'm just going to do a final run-through of any other questions I should ask as I have you here, but I know there are many, many folks from the public who are also here to testify, but I just want to share this was extremely informative. Thank you for your work, your continued work, and for being here to respond to the many questions that we wanted to know more about and have a little bit of a clearer understanding exactly how the administration is building out infrastructure.

One final run-through before I open up. Council Member Brewer, do you have any final questions?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Maybe you asked this because I was downstairs. Cruise ships, are we doing cruise ships? Did that get asked? Something about Staten Island and a cruise ship.

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER ISCOL: We're looking into it.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Thank you.

3 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you for the
4 commitments you've made to some of the followup
5 questions I had and some of the numbers that I've
6 asked for. We'll be following up as soon as possible
7 for all of that.

8 With that, thank you all so much. Looking
9 forward to staying engaged and in partnership.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: We will be
11 calling a panel of public witnesses next, but please
12 give us a few moments as we shift over.

13 Thank you, everyone, for your patience. I
14 will now be calling our first panel for public
15 testimony. We'll start with New York State Senator
16 Alessandra Biaggi followed by Jessica Franco Ramos
17 and then Frankie Miranda. Senator Biaggi, you can go
18 ahead when the Sergeant calls time.

19 SENATOR BIAGGI: Thanks very much. Can you
20 hear me all right?

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Yes, we can
22 hear you.

23 SENATOR BIAGGI: Okay. I wasn't sure about
24 that. Thank you so much. Let me know when it's my
25 time to begin.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time has begun.

SENATOR BIAGGI: Thank you very much. Good afternoon, Chairwoman and Members of the Committee on Immigration. I want to just say thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to testify today and also for holding honestly such a thoughtful hearing. I think those questions that you all asked in the previous session were incredible, and I learned a lot and I hope that for those who are at home and for those who are watching and members of the press that they also learned a lot.

For those who don't know, my name is Alessandra Biaggi, and I have the honor of serving as the State Senator for the 34th State Senate District, which includes Orchard Beach, and I'm testifying today to express my deep concern for the migrants who will be sent to the planned Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Center in Orchard Beach's parking lot. It really is my sincere hope that Mayor Eric Adams and his administration will be thoughtful and change course and also pursue alternative temporary shelter options, many of which we've heard today as suggestions. My office and I have been in close contact with organizers on the ground, with mutual

aid groups on the ground since August helping migrants acclimate once they arrive in New York City. Many mutual aid organizations and migrants have expressed alarm regarding the lack of resources available upon their arrival to Port Authority. Yesterday, as just one quick anecdote, I was able to hear from one of the migrants who came to New York City from Venezuela, and I think it was one of the most gut-wrenching stories I've heard in a very long time about his experience. Many asylum seekers are arriving without knowledge of how to access resources in this country and this city, including food, clothing, phone service, and accessible transportation. We did hear, yes, earlier about the efforts to make these kinds of services available, but it's not happening at 100 percent effective rate. Our government is not providing the basic necessities that they need to be able to start a life here in New York or really to reach their final destination and so we've got to do better. We have had heard firsthand the dangerous experiences that migrants are having in our city shelter system, which we understand, of course, is overwhelmed, but the proposed relief center at Orchard Beach feels like

and seems like after hearing a little more today an insufficient and inappropriate solution. Mutual aid groups and others have raised important concerns about the planned facility including the lack of running water and adequate bathroom facilities. We did hear, of course, about having different showers and different trailers set up, but, for the number of people who will be there, we do not believe that this is a sufficient amount. Also, insufficient temperature control, unsafe closeness of beds...

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time has expired.

SENATOR BIAGGI: Okay. Thank you. I will have my testimony fully given to the Committee so you can read it, but let me just end by saying that in the midst of this humanitarian crisis, I really do encourage the City to make systemic changes to an overburdened shelter system because we have to do better in New York City. That is our mandate as New Yorkers. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you, Senator Biaggi. Next, we are calling Jessica Franco Ramos followed by Frankie Miranda and then Cassie Keith. If you're in-person, you can come up to the

dais and have a seat when you hear your name called.
You just push the button on the mic.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Do you have any
(INAUDIBLE)

JESSICA FRANCO RAMOS: No, not at the
moment, but I'm happy to email it later.

Good afternoon, everyone. My name is
Jessica Franco Ramos. I'm Director of Community
Affairs and Special Events for State Senator Salazar.
She covers all of Senate District 18. Thank you for
inviting me to give my testimony at this hearing on
behalf of the asylum seekers and on behalf of New
York State Senator Julia Salazar.

I want to thank Councilwoman Hanif and
the entire City Council for its concerns about the
lives of our newest members of New York City. It was
not that long ago where in my own journey to this
country I traveled by foot across the U.S. border in
pursuit of freedom and a better way of life for
myself and my siblings and for my future family. In
my 2,550-mile walk, I was fueled by hope and the
knowledge that those on the other side of the border
would understand how much more we had in common in
our ambitions and dreams for a better future. My

journey, one filled with fear, pain, and ambition and much determination, would not be in vain.

On September 22nd, a group of asylum seekers were physically assaulted at a shelter site in Brooklyn North over at 193 Cook Street, which is in Senator Salazar's District, District 18. Fearing for their lives, the four families that were physically assaulted fled in the middle of the night. Some went to a shelter in Queens and two families walked over to the PATH Assessment Shelter in the Bronx. I'm going to repeat. They walked. There was no train, there was no bus. They're very new and so they don't know how to do mass transportation. The Office of State Senator Salazar and I personally have been in contact with the families. Currently, they are in stable condition and in semi-permanent housing. The next steps are making sure that their children are attending schools located in proximity to their new communities and for the families to learn their rights as asylum seekers and the protections they're entitled to now that they're here in New York City.

These attacks are traumatizing and unforgiveable, a sign of complete failure and neglect. A full and independent investigation must

take place for this shelter over at 193 Cook Street by the provider of Acacia. To leave this incident without a full investigation and understanding of what took place is to guarantee that it would happen again. Many families have shared that they have faced xenophobic discrimination based on their immigration status, that they've been made fun and threatened that ICE will be called if they complained, they've been served moldy food, and many times have not been provided equitable translation. As New Yorkers, immigrants contribute unimaginable time and expense to make the city great. For this reason, we expect and deserve more from our government and the institutions that represent them. This is a city built by and for immigrants. It is interwoven...

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time has expired.

JESSICA FRANCO RAMOS: Culture and tapestry of New York City. Thank you for your time. Please do a full investigation. Thank you.

FRANCESCA PERRONE: Good afternoon. My name is Francesca Perrone. I'm a Policy Analyst at the Hispanic Federation, and I'm presenting this testimony on behalf of our President and CEO, Frankie Miranda.

Thank you, Chair Hanif and all other Members of the Committee on Immigration, for allowing me to present this testimony on behalf of the Hispanic Federation, a non-profit organization that's seeking to empower and advance the Hispanic community. As the largest Latino umbrella organization in the nation, the Federation collaborates with a network of 500 non-profits in 41 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. More than 174 of our members and partners are here in New York City.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Could you speak directly into the mic?

FRANCESCA PERRONE: Yes, sorry. I'm here today to discuss how we can continue to support asylum seekers and migrants in New York City. In order to complete my testimony in the allotted time, I'm going to shorten our submitted written testimony and be as direct as possible. The individuals arriving at our border are abiding by U.S. and international laws and have every right to make their claim for asylum. Many are escaping unimaginable horrors, including civil strife, environmental disasters, extreme poverty, and physical violence and

so much more. They deserve to be treated with respect, dignity, and compassion when they arrive in our country. Sadly, we have shameless politicians such as Governor Abbott and Governor DeSantis that choose to exploit the most vulnerable among us, including children, pregnant mothers, and families all fleeing persecution. They are trying to fearmonger and trying to score cheap political points. Here in New York, we stand ready to do what we have always done, which is to bring communities and institutions together to welcome and help those most in need. This summer, the staff at the Hispanic Federation has traveled to Port Authority on many mornings to joint the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to welcome those being bused from Texas. At Port Authority, non-profit organizations and city staff are the first people to welcome individuals and offer resources such as personal hygiene products and clothing. We've seen firsthand the importance of culturally and linguistically relevant assistance. This group has been able to connect these individuals with essential resources including health insurance, shelter, food, and legal services.

The City Council and Mayor's Office must lead by expanding resources and partnership with these trusted community-based organizations to deliver culturally and linguistically competent care. Migrants deserve the right to receive information in their native language, and these community-based organizations have proven their ability to efficiently connect with high-need individuals and provide services. We encourage city government to minimize duplication of efforts by partnering with the Hispanic Federation and our network to ensure that incoming migrants continue to receive timely, high-quality care. We hope city government can provide additional investments for these organizations to meet the influx of asylum seekers and help them achieve the quality of life that they have fought so hard to obtain.

Additionally, while New York City must remain committed to providing services to those who are seeking asylum, we must be mindful of the wants and needs of our migrants. There are many asylum seekers who wish to reside in other states and to be reunited with family or loved ones.

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony. We look forward to working you to provide support for migrants, and we will continue to advocate to ensure that their needs are being met with dignity and respect.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. Is there anybody else on this panel?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you. We'll now move to Cassie Keith who is joining us via Zoom. Cassie, you can proceed when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time has begun.

CASSIE KEITH: My name is Cassie Keith. Thank you for taking my testimony today about the ongoing migrant crisis. As you know, there is currently a tremendous drain on the shelter system, but, despite the (INAUDIBLE) from City Hall, this issue existed long before the arrival of migrants out of state. People have been entering shelter for years due to eviction process, clearly by uncontrolled rate hikes, and many like me have been stuck in the shelter for many years because they are undocumented. Unfortunately, over the coming months, many who have arrived recently will become undocumented, and when

that happens there is no pathway out of the shelter system. The Mayor has requested the right to work permits for migrants who are coming in. This is (INAUDIBLE) when you search for a job with your address as a shelter, many employers won't give you a chance. I have lost many job opportunities because of the prejudice people have towards the homeless. These asylum seekers must stay away from criminal (INAUDIBLE) This is difficult because we have fully criminalized the homeless and being in a shelter means being subjected to violence. People will attack and, when they defend themselves, they will be arrested and risk deportation. More security will not solve this. I have never seen staff attack with them, but they (INAUDIBLE) If you shout, they will make it worse, even the people who attacked me in the shelter system. The Mayor plans to open up (INAUDIBLE) to deal with the influx, but those in the shelter know they will not be temporary or (INAUDIBLE) new arrival. In the shelter next to me, we have people, men and women, sleeping on lawn chairs. This has been true since long before the asylum seekers came in. It's asylum seekers today, but anyone getting evicted over the coming months now runs the risk of being

placed in one of these tents. There are two pathways ahead of us. On the one hand, this challenge is to live up to the promises we already made as a City. We can use this opportunity to open the pathways for folks who have been in the shelter a long time to get a permanent (INAUDIBLE). On the other hand, this will present an end of the right to shelter as we know it. If you (INAUDIBLE) there is an aging and vulnerable population of undocumented people living in the shelter. They have no pathway to permanent housing. We need people to understand that once people become undocumented they are not eligible for programs that can get them out like CityFHEPS. They will join me and thousands like me who are getting older and sicker and won't have the time to get out. I ask the City Council to do everything in its power to open CityFHEPS to undocumented New Yorkers and create the desperately needed shelter capacity by moving people out who would've been stuck in the shelter for years. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

Next, we will hear from Nilbia Coyote. Nilbia, you can go ahead when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time has begun.

NILBIA COYOTE: Good afternoon. My name is Nilbia Coyote. I'm the ED at New Immigrant Community Empowerment, NICE, one of the largest CBOs in Jackson Heights Queens. I will deliver this testimony on behalf of (INAUDIBLE) asylum seekers that are not members of NICE but who do not want to reveal their identity or participate in this hearing out of fear. NICE's mission is to organize new immigrants, day laborers, and families in New York to be build their collective power. To achieve this, we combine the strength of workforce development training and education on workers' rights, advocacy, and programs tailored to immigrant workers. We have always supported recently arrived immigrants and asylum seekers, and we have become a safe haven for all. However, in recent months there has been an exponential growth in the demand for our services, mostly our workforce development services. Why does that matter for asylum seekers? Because the reality is that the new companeros and companeras are in dire need of a stable situation, dignified housing, food, clothing for the winter, and to plan for the future. To do that, they need a steady job and safe income. Without (INAUDIBLE) work papers and information on

how to stay safe and protect themselves, our asylum seekers are at great risk of workplace safety violations, injury, and even death as thousands of other undocumented New Yorkers are already. This is why hundreds of asylum seekers are coming to our centers and offices every week. Just last night, we had over 350 new people coming to our orientation. What is for sure is that asylum seekers are now joining the ranks of the very vulnerable workforce of new immigrants, day laborers, and undocumented workers looking for trabajitos or small jobs in the construction industry to make some money, and that's how eventually at the paradass or corners and worker centers like ours they found out about the OSHA card, worker rights, and what they need to do to work in (INAUDIBLE) market of the construction industry. Currently, our OSHA and assisted trainings, skills development trainings, and wage theft clinics are filled out by asylum seekers and new immigrants. At NICE, we're concentrating our efforts on workforce development for asylum seekers because the long-term economic integration is often an invisible barrier no one is talking about. New immigrants are already being exploited by wage theft and unscrupulous

employers who have used their desperation. We cannot let that happen. In the coming year, NICE has the ability to train new immigrants and asylum seekers and give them the tools they need to thrive regardless of their immigration status, but we can only do this with the continued support of the City and other governments. We, nevertheless, ask the City Council Members and the administration to continue the conversation on these other needs of asylum seekers and thousands of immigrant workers in the city. Along with legal services, food, housing, dignified jobs, and worker rights are fundamental to the integration and contribution of new immigrants to our city. Lastly, we ask to continue fighting for the thousands of immigrants who have been filing for legal status and immigration reform for years in New York City.

Thank you so much. We appreciate your time.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I have a question for Senator Biaggi if she's still on.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Senator Biaggi, are you still available?

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: We can come back to her. Go ahead.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much for all the work you're doing and NICE is doing. My question is, because I'm very concerned, as you heard, I want working papers, I want the federal government to do what they're supposed to do, etc., but in the interim how are you able to get people jobs, is there something else the City could be doing to be of assistance, the Municipal ID doesn't help, does this working internship mean anything when people don't have working papers? I know you're the expert. Thank you.

NILBIA COYOTE: Thank you for the question. We actually need a lot of support and resources. One of the dire needs of these newcomers are the lack of ID numbers. This is not a legal practice, but this is a practice that a lot of companies in the construction industry allow workers to have so they can get jobs. Another situation is that once asylum seekers are graduating for OSHA-assisted training, we need the federal and the local governments to accelerate the process to get those cards. Otherwise, people are not allowed to work on

the construction sites, and the issuance of those cards can take one to two months. That's a long time. We have been noticing that people need to work. They need to work right away. I would say ID numbers, collaboration of federal government and local government for these workers to have their OSHA (INAUDIBLE) cards and obviously opportunities of jobs in the construction industry will be much appreciated, working with either employers, subcontractors, and probably even unions to be able to get jobs for more and more immigrant workers in the city.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: While I have Nilbia on, could you hare how many asylum seekers NICE has been supporting and how much more funding is required to meet the organizational need to continue supporting asylum seekers?

NILBIA COYOTE: Thank you, Councilwoman Hanif. I did mention this, but we have seen new waves of new immigrants coming to our city for the last three years. This is nothing new as probably my companera Yesenia will share from La Colmena. However, we have seen a lot of new (INAUDIBLE) in the

last month, but for the last two years we have been referring over 500 individuals to the shelter system. Additionally, right now, we have been probably receiving over 150 individuals per day at our center. Half of them are what we call new immigrants. As the members of the administration were explaining, we don't have accurate information to say that all of them are asylum seekers because many people arrive and they haven't started the process. That's why we call them newly arrived immigrants because we don't have that specific information. If you make a calculation of over 100 people per day, it's like almost more than 500 people per week. We hold monthly orientations for new members of NICE, and we have seen since July an increase of individuals. In July, we had over 100 people in our orientation. In August, we had almost 150 people, and last night we had 350 individuals arriving to our orientation. We had to turn away 100 people and we had to provide two orientations. Each one of them to 125. 90 percent of these individuals are newly arrived immigrants to the city. Just to give you another indicator, we are holding OSHA classes this month of September. I was in one of these classes last Wednesday, and we have a

maximum amount of 40 people per class. This is what is legally accepted by OSHA, and 21 of these students are newly arrived immigrants. They come from Venezuela, from Cuba, from Columbia, from Ecuador, and I would say 80 percent of them are in their track of asylum process.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you, Nilbia. That's really, really helpful to know. For the folks who you've had to turn away, where have they gone?

NILBIA COYOTE: They're going to have to come back for another orientation from NICE. The situation is that obviously all these people need to work and, for us at least, we need to have a process because we do have a demand for OSHA (INAUDIBLE) classes so we ask them to come to these orientations. What we are trying to do because we are working with the City is to ramp up our trainings since we know that the construction industry is one of the places where people are going to be looking for work. They're already, las paradas, the corners, that how we know, and nobody's going to hire you without the OSHA (INAUDIBLE) training so we ask them to come back. If they cannot come back, we refer them to our sister organizations such as La Colmena who is going

to be talking also today and other trustworthy places where they can get their certifications, but it is important to mention that OSHA (INAUDIBLE) cards are one of the biggest frauds and abuses among the immigrant community so obviously that makes this population very vulnerable to scams and frauds everywhere in the city.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Right, right. Thank you so much. Appreciate that and appreciate your continued work here.

To Senator Biaggi, thank you so much first of all for testifying and being on today. As an elected in the area, were you engaged in any conversation about the selection of Orchard Beach as a HERRC?

SENATOR BIAGGI: Unfortunately, I was not and, had I been, I probably would have mentioned that Orchard Beach is considered not just a low-lying coastal area but it's in the middle of a hurricane evacuation zone 1 which is the highest risk category for flooding in all of New York City Emergency Management's zones.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Now that we've caused some noise around this and have repeatedly talked

about the flood-prone area, etc., what are the conversations the administration is engaging in with you and other local electeds at this time?

SENATOR BIAGGI: I will say that I think this is an area where they are, at least in my experience, trying to communicate as much and as frequently as possible so I was able to communicate and have a conversation with Commissioner Iscol actually this morning. My team has been included on a lot of the calls that they're doing with elected officials. There was one yesterday, but what I will just say is that these conversations are helpful, they are important because nothing can be done without communication, but an important theme that I think is resonating throughout these conversations is the theme of what feels like impossibility, and what I mean by this is that there is almost a sense of determination to erect these tents in Orchard Beach and in other places, and I think there's a little bit of a blind spot, if not a lot of bit of a blind spot, around the impact that this is having on the migrants and so from the conversations that I've had in addition to the administration but also with some of the migrants, we know that they're calling these

tents hieleras, and I apologize if I did not pronounce that 100 percent properly, but that term refers to the detention facilities on the borders and so the simple fact that these tents remind them of the trauma that they have just encountered entering our country really feels outrageous and it cannot be the standard that we set for lots of different reasons, we don't want this to be the precedent, and I think that it is imperative that we find alternative locations that are true brick and mortar that will provide safety for the long-term if it is that someone has to stay beyond 96 hours because we know the reality is that that probably is a likelihood. I'll stop there because I'm sure you have other questions but I just wanted to give you some additional background.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: No, thank you so much for that. What is your hope moving forward?

SENATOR BIAGGI: My number one hope is that as government officials and as government partners from city, state, and federal that we trust each other, number one, to be able to communicate what is going on because I think one of the worst things that can happen is that we find out when

either something has already been decided or we find out in the press. I think it's something that doesn't set the tone of the relationship that we are aiming to have so that's number one. Open communication and decision-making that includes us before the decision is actually final. That's number one. Number two, we have got to find alternative locations. I know that this is a situation that is happening in New York City because these are migrants that are coming through Port Authority, but this is not a New York City sole problem. This is a New York State issue that we have to deal with collectively, and so that means that when we're looking for alternative centers we should be looking beyond New York City to places like Westchester County. I know that there are campuses, I know that there are empty facilities, there's the Westchester County Center, I'm sure there's lots of different events being held there just like there are events being held at Javits, but here's the thing, in New York we have done the impossible in so many situations and times when people counted us out, and this is one of those situations where we can't get this wrong because people's lives are at stake so communication,

alternative location, and then at the end of the day I think that really what we have the possibility to do here is to actually set the standard of what it looks like to succeed because at the end of the day we all want to make sure that every single human being, because I want to just remind those who might dehumanize the migrants that these are human beings who are coming here to New York, that every single human being that sets forth into New York State is treated with the same amount of dignity that we would treat anybody else. That is the standard that we set as New Yorkers, and we cannot just write people off simply because the way in which they've gotten here or their immigration status. I think that we have to move beyond that, and we have to do it urgently and, honestly in a situation like this where we have an administration, I think there are a lot of staff members working very hard, but at the end of the day, our Mayor sets the tone and the tone right now is not a good one and so we've got as elected officials to really continue to call out the needs and the desires that we think are important and those things include not putting people in tents because at the end of the day you can call it whatever you want to call it,

that's what they are, and if they're going to trigger more trauma it's our responsibility to prevent that from happening so those are my hopes. Thank you for asking those questions. I think they're incredibly important, and I have faith that we can do this. I know we can. We pulled the impossible off during COVID. We can do anything in this city, but we have to want to, and I think that right now my question is whether or not this Mayor actually wants to do that.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much. No more questions for this panel.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you. Next, we will call Pedro Perez, Murad Awawdeh, Aracelis Lucero, and Camille Mackler. You can come up to the dais and just flagging for anyone who might need language interpretation services, we do have those available. Just reach out to the Sergeants and they can help you out.

Pedro, you can go ahead whenever you're ready.

PEDRO PEREZ: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Pedro Perez, and I'm proudly from Venezuela. Myself as a migrant, I know firsthand what is going on really in the whole situation with the shelters,

and I want to bring to the table what's really happening about the LGBT community. As a member of that, I have seen by my own eyes and have listened from many members of the community that are suffering all types of harassment, sexual harassment and general, and I heard and I learned a lot and there's some blind spots about this whole situation. We are not being able to choose where we want to be. That's my case. (INAUDIBLE) they're trying to get to a shelter of the LGBT community that I won't be able, and I don't know why because I have testified in front of them what is happening and they won't listen to me so I think we should point this out because this is very, very delicate point because people are getting deep depression by going through this, and I do believe that great mental health is a great society so whenever the worst conditions are being in the shelters, the worse is going to be the results of the mental health of every member of that shelter, no matter what are your sexual orientation or situation right now. I think we should point this out and take into account of the community's or the people that are going through this. I want to thank you all for letting me expose this point, and I really want you

to take this into account and I'm sure we all make a difference and that's all I want to say. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you, Pedro. Next, we will move on to Murad Awawdeh.

MURAD AWAWDEH: Good morning, almost evening to everyone. Congrats on your marathon hearing, Chairperson. I want to just point out that there's no one here from the administration and no one actually listening to the stories that you're about to hear. The fact of the matter is that we sat through over three hours of testimony, I don't even know how much time that was, but, yes, of hearing a lot of dodging of questions, humanitarian, we've never seen a humanitarian urgent moment like this, and I think hearing from folks on the ground is critically important at this point.

My name is Murad Awawdeh. I'm the Executive Director of the New York Immigration Coalition. We're an umbrella advocacy and policy organization that works across the state with over 200 members serving immigrant communities. Thank you to the Immigration Chair Hanif and the Members of the City Council for convening this important hearing and

allowing us an opportunity to testify. New York is facing a pivotal moment in its long history of welcoming newcomers. Since May, we've been responding to the humanitarian crisis with the sudden arrival of more than 15,000 immigrants to our city. This crisis is caused by both our broken immigration system and the Governor of Texas, Greg Abbott, using human beings as political pawns by busing them and their families directly to New York City. Even before the first buses started to arrive, organizations like ours, Catholic Charities, and many others started receiving notices to appear for folks which are immigration notices, and people started arriving to our offices. We did not receive as many as Catholic Charities, but folks started to come seeking support. By early August, the buses started coming directly to Port Authority. That does not mean that the buses were not coming before, and I want to give a huge shoutout to Team TLC New York City, to Artists-Athletes-Activist, and the amazing volunteers who've held it down, welcoming buses at Port Authority, not at Port Authority, welcoming people at airports which is happening. Adama Bah, (INAUDIBLE), and everyone else who's really stepping up in this moment to make

sure that our folks are welcomed with dignity and with respect.

This moment calls for a robust coordinated response from the federal government down to the local one. We need to step up in a different way than we have been, and, while the City has been taking steps to ensure that asylum seekers are welcomed, just welcoming people is not enough, and I'll be wrapping up shortly. I want to highlight some really top priorities that we want the City to take and are demanding in this moment through our Welcoming New York campaign which is allocating 10 million dollars for emergency immigration legal services, an additional 10 million for community-based organizations that provide wraparound services, organizing mobile vaccine clinics at shelters, expanding the eligibility of CityFHEPS, and providing rental assistance to individuals regardless of immigration status, filling the vacant units within the CHIP program, the Community Housing Improvement Program, apartments across the city, and providing 500,000 dollars in emergency funding to immediately place additional interpreters at enrollment centers and pop-up sites for the next two months, place

newcomer youth in schools where staff have training in supporting newcomers and English-language learners, bilingual mental health supports where they are also readily available, and providing robust wraparound services for our youngest newest New Yorkers, and we want to ensure that asylum-seeking families and their children have access to continuous education, social, and language-based support services throughout the academic year. We have an opportunity to help New York respond in a way that provides a path forward not just for the city but for the country. In order to meet the overwhelming and unmet needs of asylum seekers, New York must act swiftly and strategically.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to testify, and we look forward to working with you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you. You can go ahead, Aracelis.

ARACELIS LUCERO: Hello. Thank you to Immigration Chair Shahana Hanif. I had thank you also to all the remaining administrators, but they're not here. My name is Aracelis Lucero. I am the Executive Director of Masa, a community-based organization in South Bronx who for the last decades has a history of

working with immigrants, especially recently arrived immigrants, providing them with critical services around education and wraparound family support services as well as advocacy and leadership opportunities for youth and parents in the areas of education and immigration. Masa is a member of the New York Immigration Coalition, the New York City Coalition for Educational Justice, the Language Access Collaborative under the New York Immigration Coalition, and also the Education Collaborative under the New York Immigration Coalition.

As the asylum crisis has unfolded, we didn't have to wait for too long to start seeing more people continuing to trickling into our centers requesting services and help. Due to capacity concerns, we have not been publicizing much of the support that we can give. However, daily, about three to five families or groups of people from shelters, schools, or referrals come to Masa looking for basic help like jobs, food, cash, basic necessities like hygiene supplies, clothing, ESL classes, health resources, especially mental health resources for young children, and earlier on enrollment support. We've also been seeing families just come for even

laundry money. When we asked what kind of support they are getting from the shelters, they seem lost and confused and simply say that the person that has been helping them no longer has resources for them or simply don't know how to answer. Most recently, many have walked in looking for winter coats and clothing and food. As a response, we are reinstating our food pantry program that we ended in late June and starting a winter clothing drive as we know of very few places providing clothing. Every person or family that comes through our door has a minimum of three to five things that they need help with, which are trying our best to do, and we expect more to be coming through because of word of mouth and especially as the winter months approach.

Today, I'd like to share some recommendations that Masa along with other fierce advocates and coalition members have been advocating for for years and which quite frankly if they had been funded would have made the city more equipped today to handle situations like these, especially in times of crisis and especially in support of immigrant communities. The first that I'd like to address is language access. I truly disagree with

some of the things that were said here on the language line. It is our community members' experience that even with Local Law 30 many times even information in Spanish isn't available or interpretation is not available in key places like schools, hospitals, clinics, and with large social service providers. Furthermore, many people refuse to use the language line or are not happy with it because often they say things are lost in translation or the wrong variant of their language is being used. This is especially important for asylum seekers where their stories really cannot be lost in translation in order to create credible cases for them. For this reason, the Language Access Collaborative comprised of Masa, the New York Immigration Coalition, Asian American Federation, and African Communities Together have been advocating for the creation of language worker co-operatives for languages of limited diffusion in order to meet the need. We need culturally competent and well-trained community members that are more equipped to be trusting relationships with those who will need it more. Historically, marginalized communities and those recently arrived who are struggling to navigate

complex and large New York City systems don't get that type of support.

The other area that I'd like to address is education. We've seen how English-language learners have severely underperformed through really no fault of their own because schools have been ill-equipped to support them. One group that has been forgotten are our older newcomer or under-credited (INAUDIBLE) who have very little school options that will provide the level of support needed for them to succeed. Most of the schools that do provide the support are actually in Manhattan and very few in the boroughs which is concerning. For the past three years, the New York Immigration Coalition Education Collaborative has asked the City Council to fund 2.1 million to support the creation of 400 additional seats to support these youth. We know more has to be done as only 60 percent of English-language learner students are graduating compared to 81 percent for the general population. We already know that thousands of school-age youth are already in our system. The last count I believe was 4,600.

Furthermore, parent engagement of limited English proficient parents is also poor, and our fear that

without a proper engagement strategy to involve parents, student performance and their social/emotional well-being will suffer.

 Last but not least, I'd like to flag that as part of the New York City Coalition for Educational Justice, not only did this parent-powered group advocate for a culture-responsive education definition and anti-bias training but the creation of a culturally responsive curriculum which under the prior administration was named the Mosaic curriculum. I would recommend that the City Council ask the New York City Department of Education how this new curriculum would specifically support English-language learners and ensure that they're feeling welcome and see themselves and their families, not just in chapters or in monthly celebrations and Taco Tuesdays, but as meaningful, whole, and contributing members of their school communities every single day.

 For years, we've been advocating for resources to address systemic barriers and systems of oppression that continue to keep black and brown communities marginalized. We cannot continue to just meet the status quo but instead realize that when we are doing our best by the most marginalized

communities than it serves to uplift all of us, and we are a greater city for that. Thank you for your time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you. Camille, you can go ahead.

CAMILLE MACKLER: Thank you. I speak fast. I'm Camille Mackler, the Executive Director of Immigrant ARC. We are a coalition of over 80 organizations that provide immigration legal services throughout New York State. I am here to speak specifically about the legal needs and how the administration has absolutely failed to meet them. Sadly, our immigration system is designed to make anyone who tries to go through it fail, and it is a system that at this point requires a lawyer or requires legal assistance to navigate and to be successful. There are numerous statistics all in my testimony of the impact of having legal representation. At this time, legal service providers have for years now been pivoting every single year to meet the latest demand, the latest crisis. We know how to do rapid response, and we are stunned that our expertise has been dismissed by the administration in favor of creating programs that limit the level of

services that people receive to the bare minimum and do not engage in our ability to shape a legal service delivery system that would meaningfully help people protect their rights and assert their right to apply for asylum. There have been many stakeholder engagements. It does not appear that any of the feedback that we gave was incorporated into it. The latest procurement does not allow for meaningful legal service delivery. It also seems premised on an assumption that lawyers can simply walk away from the cases that they currently represent. Lawyers have been scrambling, legal services I should say, it's not just lawyers, have been scrambling to meet this need, but at the end of the day an attorney has an ethical obligation to represent his current clients but also how can we walk away from those who are already receiving our services, and no attorney wants to say no to somebody who needs their help and no attorney wants to know that somebody is going through the process without their assistance but they need resources to do that and there are ways to do it, and for some reason they don't seem to have been listened to.

We also applaud the initiative to go to the State and the Feds. With the State, if the City would like the support of the State, we would ask that they come out in support of the Access to Representation Act, which is a bill that would create a right to counsel for anybody facing deportation in New York's immigration courts. At the federal level, money from the Feds would be great of course. It is long past time that the federal government should be providing an attorney or a legal representation to anyone going through the immigration system, but they could also be helping us advocate for extensions of parole because right now these individuals are in the country with at most 60 days to figure it all out and get their applications filed, and the reality is they can't even file their case until they get to court and that's going to take four to six months. An extension for two years would allow these individuals to come to the United States, to apply for work authorization, to orient themselves to their new communities, and to get the services that they need without the fear of deportation hanging over their heads. We echo the ask of the New York Immigration Coalition for 10 million dollars. I would also say

that our current funding structures are such that they've responded to crisis after crisis and are siloed in the way that they can deliver services so when we think of funding we need to think of the short-term rapid response funding that is needed in any emergency situation but also long-term funding to create sustainable resources that will go on for the years that it takes to get an immigration case through. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much.

Aracelis, I'd love to get to know a little bit more about the language access needs. We're having a hearing on October 19th on a package of bills that would advance, strengthen language access in our city. One of the bills in that package is mine for the creation of the Office of Interpretation and Translation under the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. In this budget cycle, we put in the investment for the worker co-operatives for language services, which has not been ruled out yet. We're waiting to determine what that's going to look like, but, of course, it's not going to happen without the Coalition that had been pushing for many, many years to move towards a worker co-operative model to

provide language services. If you could just talk a little bit more about why it's so critical to not outsource or do it through Language Line and rather focus on in-community talent and skills, paid folks to really do language access right.

ARACELIS LUCERO: There's several components. I think it really also depends on the community members that we're serving. There's different levels of literacy. There's also culturally a lot of like oral tradition communities that are coming over that feel the safest with, like there may be something with a woman or experiencing something that they only feel comfortable talking to another woman or somebody that looks like them. We've had several instances, and this is not new, this is like years and years and why we've been advocating, and really it was also in response to when the city put in money for (INAUDIBLE), this is years ago, because what we were realizing is a lot of legal service providers were reaching out to community-based organizations for culturally responsive support and translation to have these interviews with asylum seekers, with people who are going through their immigration case because it wasn't always the case

that they were being 100 percent truthful or felt comfortable and so with immigration, with health especially I have a personal experience with my dad, unfortunately he passed away, where he wasn't comfortable with language line and I went to help support him. I really do think that that made a difference with him being comfortable telling the doctor what was happening in his situation. Unfortunately, he passed away of a massive heart attack a week after I was able to accompany him to Lincoln Hospital, and so it is critically important because for the lives of the families that are coming here it is truly a life-or-death situation. We cannot miss a beat. We cannot miss a step, and I am telling you that there are things that we hear in our office that we ask them why didn't they say something or this would be an important thing for their case to share, and it's because there was no trust. We've also partnered for a very long time with organizations like UnLocal where Masa staff would step in to provide interpretation or we already had built trust with the community and so we would sit with the lawyer and sit with the community member who we already had heard their case several times but we

weren't lawyers to help them to help support that process in documenting their cases and making sure that we were able to collect all of the things that they needed in order to have a strong case whenever they would present in court. There's many, many instances, people will take their children, and you're retraumatizing children. Again, the language line, every single system, we help the Education, the Health and Hospitals, the legal system. Every single time we talk to community members and we work specifically with a large indigenous-speaking community who has a lot of oral traditions. They're not going to be comfortable. Also, whenever they don't know their rights, whenever they don't know who to really trust, that's another problem so they're not going to completely be transparent about what their issue is.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much for that. Pedro, thank you so much for just lifting up how critical it is to have resources and services and a very hands-on approach to folks who are part of the LGBTQ community. Could you share, are you right now placed in a shelter that is meeting your needs?

PEDRO PEREZ: Yes, I'm currently staying in Brooklyn. My shelter is located in Brooklyn, and basically what we have to do to slide in that jungle, just expressing words, is to stay quiet, try to be invisible, try to not show up so much, and just in the first time you have the opportunity to just leave and be out there as much time as possible because the more time you spend inside, the more probable it is that you're going to suffer any type of harassment.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So you're not in a queer-friendly shelter right now?

PEDRO PEREZ: No.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: How long have you tried to get transferred out?

PEDRO PEREZ: Today is the fourth day.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Fourth day? For the last four days you've been trying to get transferred out?

PEDRO PEREZ: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: What have they said to you?

PEDRO PEREZ: Okay, so Ivan said that in the shelter that I want to be transferred to, they say basically that I'm too old to get in, I'm 22

years old, and I've heard also that that shelter allows from 18 to 25 so there's clearly something that is missing, somebody's not doing their job because it's not just me. There's a few people that are experiencing the same thing. Yeah, basically that.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Outside of the shelter, have they at least connected you to resources or communities where you can receive the friendship or be in community with other LGBTQ folks in our city?

PEDRO PEREZ: In my case, what I do when I go out of the shelter is hang around with Team TLC and have some volunteer, that's what we're doing today, and basically yeah, there is a few people of the community and we just hang out, just being away from the places we do not want to be. My point is that we should figure out a way how to spot the LGBT community and bring in to a safe environment where they can be truly who they are and dress like they want to dress, do whatever they want to do, act like they want to act, and not being hurt physically and mentally for that.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Absolutely. Thank you for that. No more questions for the panel, but if Murad, Camille, if you have anything to add, would appreciate.

MURAD AWAWDEH: Just to echo and piggyback of off this brother's comments on his experience, there's actually specifically a queer couple who was thrown out of the shelter last night and then there was a rapid response moment where folks from Artists-Athletes-Activists were trying to triage the situation and pretty much were told they do not meet eligibility. What is the eligibility that they do not meet, we do not know. We've been asking those questions, and it's not a unique situation. Sometimes people are placed in temporary shelter and then for some reason are told, these are folks who are actually recertifying, filing in, signing in, being in in-time and are still having issues with navigating the shelter system. I think that, yes, the system is overwhelmed, but there's a way to do this where we're actually treating people with respect, giving them the shelter that they need, but I do think that there's an enormous amount of additional issues that you're going to hear in this hearing from

other folks who have been supporting that work, specifically about the shelter and how people are being treated in it.

CAMILLE MACKLER: I'm going to defer to my Colleagues who are going to be testifying next on legal services.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Awesome. Thank you all.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you. We'll next be calling Joshua Goldfein, Natalia Aristizabal Betancur, Yesenia Mata, and Lorena Kourousias. Apologize if I butchered anyone's name and thank you all for bearing with us. We have quite a few witnesses signed up. Joshua, you can go ahead whenever you're ready.

JOSHUA GOLDFEIN: Thank you. I just want say again thank you to the Chair and the Committee for this hearing. Today, we got some answers to questions that we've been waiting for for a long time. The concerns about whether the new facilities are compliant with Callahan and other rules around the right to shelter are important not just because these are technical requirements but because they are commonsense rules that ensure that people are safe

and secure, and, if people do not feel safe and secure in these new facilities, they will leave them and all of this effort will have been for naught so we want to make sure that people feel comfortable in the places that we're sending them and it seems like, at a minimum, the City should be using the standards that already exist so that people don't feel like they're getting something less than what they would get in another system.

It was also very important to hear the City say that they do not intend to place children in congregate settings and to have them on the record about that. Notably, they did not say they would not do that. They said they did not intend to do that, they don't want to do that. We appreciate that that is their view, but, of course, we have to make sure that as this plays out that that does not happen. We have seen time and time again we have litigated for decades to prevent the harm of children being placed in congregate settings.

I also want to thank the Committee and the Chair for asking the questions about housing subsidies and streamlining the ability of people to move out of the shelter system. We see that the stay

of many people at these new sites will be very short. Given the relatively low rate of what they call diversion, of getting people connected to some other place, seems like the majority of people will be coming into the shelter system and so the shelter system has to be ready for them, has to add new beds to make room for them if they don't move people out. It might be a lot easier to move people out of the existing shelter system into permanent housing, better for everyone, also create new space for the migrants and save the City money.

Finally, I just wanted to note that in the answers to the questions about legal services that the City pointed to the Navigation Center as a place where people could obtain an appointment to receive assistance with their asylum application. They're currently scheduling only 25 appointments per day, hoping to ramp up to 100 appointments per day per family, one family would get one appointment, so if you can do the math there, given the numbers they are talking about, it's clear that that will not be sufficient to provide legal services to all the people who need it, especially given the testimony of the previous panels about how crucial it is to have a

lawyer for your case so we're setting people up for failure if we don't provide them with that assistance. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you. Next, we have Natalia. Natalia, you can go when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time has begun.

NATALIA ARISTIZABEL BETANCUR: Thank you very much. My name is Natalia Aristizabal Betancur, and I am the Deputy Director at Make the Road New York. I'm going to be summarizing our testimony that we will submit in full.

On behalf of our 25,000 members and staff, we thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify today. We believe that New York must continue to serve as a welcoming city for immigrants, and that includes ensuring that individuals can access and participate in our society regardless of their immigration status. To prevent further harm to the people who have walked miles to get to the U.S. and then bused to the City, we must develop community-based infrastructure and services that will allow them to rebuild their lives here.

Make the Road New York (MRNY) is the largest grassroots immigrant organization in New York City, with a membership of over 25,000 low-income New Yorkers. We have 25 plus years of experience serving New York's communities of color, immigrant and working class families. Across all our 5 sites, we provide essential health, legal, education and survival services, while also continuing to organize our communities to innovate policies that will improve their lives. We submit this testimony to highlight how our organization has responded to the critical needs presented by the migrants being relocated to our city from Texas, and to underscore to the Committee the critical importance of using all resources available to meet their specific needs in this challenging and often confusing moment. Based on our long history and deep experience working with and alongside immigrant populations, we offer our insight to underscore that the City must immediately step up its efforts to provide resources in a number of key areas to minimize the extended trauma these newly arrived families have endured; to ensure they have what is needed to stabilize their lives, and to

provide opportunities which will allow them to fully integrate into our rich, diverse NYC community.

Over the course of the last two months, we started arriving at Port Authority, and then when the new facility was created, we have been there. We have provided Metrocards, phones, and cash assistance to folks who have recently arrived.

Additionally, we have held orientation sessions in our Jackson Heights and Bushwick offices to make sure that these folks have connections in the city and give them a little bit of one-on-one of New York City and services and to feed them and to help them navigate their lives.

I'm going to be highlighting three main pieces around immigration: services, housing, and food and transportation. Obviously, we're concerned about the ways in which they were brought to New York City, and we have concerns for the care and health and personal circumstances. Some of them shared that they were offered free rides to New York even though that they had Immigration appointments at places like (INAUDIBLE). Making matters worse, many of them were dismayed to hear that they now needed to file motions and other paperwork to transfer their immigration cases

to New York to avoid dire legal consequences such as starting deportation proceedings or having to face all of this without legal representation. The City decided to incorporate triage services as part of the Navigation Center that it opened a few weeks ago, but the City must develop a community-informed long-term plan to ensure that these individuals have legal assistance they desperately need. These individuals need as much information as possible about their immigration proceedings, because Texas is not explaining what happens to them if they fail to attend their hearings or appointments with immigration authorities in another state. Likewise, this Committee is well-aware of how important it is to ensure immigrants do not fall prey to notaries. People have been asking me personally because I've been helping folks where do they buy a social because they've been offered or that they don't have the money to buy a social. This is actually a very important piece that immigrants need to know that that's not how the process goes. This population is particularly vulnerable to unscrupulous practices. As the last person just shared, the legal appointments are very little and currently actually today the

website was down so even though we were trying to help people get appointments, we weren't able to.

The City needs to develop a better long-term plan. First, accessing the Navigation Center and the City's legal services must be simpler.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time has expired.

NATALIA ARISTIZABAL BETANCUR: People have not been able to do appointments on their own, and they have to do it through community members.

I guess I'm going to submit this testimony so that folks can see the full part, but we're also very concerned about the housing. We think that people should be able to go right away and qualify for permanent housing and not just be held in shelters.

Very quickly, food is very important. A lot of the people that we see on a daily basis, like today for example we had 40 people at our office while these hearings were happening and they were telling us that that was the first warm meal they were getting in a really long time.

I'll leave there and submit my full testimony.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

3 Next, we will hear from Yesenia Mata. You can go
4 ahead when the Sergeant calls time.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time has begun.

6 YESENIA MATA: Good afternoon and thank
7 you to Chairwoman of the Immigration Committee
8 Councilwoman Hanif and the entire team for holding
9 this important hearing.

10 At La Colmena, we are helping asylum
11 seekers from Venezuela and other parts of South
12 America with essential services and, most
13 importantly, a community. Supporting new immigrants
14 with these types of services is not anything new for
15 La Colmena as NICE has mentioned as every day we
16 enroll immigrant workers to our construction site
17 safety and OSHA classes, carpentry classes, and
18 provide worker know-your-rights training for free.
19 These types of services allow new immigrants to join
20 the workforce and feel confident about it plus
21 provide them with the support they may need if they
22 become victims of wage theft. What is different now,
23 however, is the amount of asylum seekers coming to
24 our center in need of these services, and, due to the
25 training the La Colmena staff has we have been able

to respond and keep up. Many come to our centers saying (speaking foreign language) meaning I heard this is where I can get help to get prepared for work. Many are traveling from across New York City to Staten Island and, because our center is very accessible as we are near the Staten Island Ferry, it just makes it easier for many to come to Staten Island. Additionally, because we have been at Port Authority and at the Navigation Center, we understand the needs of asylum seekers as we are culturally competent and understand the role that La Colmena plays when it comes to workforce development. To say all of this, La Colmena could not have responded so adequately if it wasn't for the amazing organizations that testified here today. It has definitely been a team effort as we all provide unique services and resources. At La Colmena, we remain committed to supporting all workers regardless of their immigration status to ensure they can join the workforce with dignity and respect. Thank you for your time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

Chair.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I don't have any questions for this panel.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: We will call Lorena. Go ahead.

VIANEY ROMERO: Hi. Good afternoon. Thank you for this opportunity for listening to me. I'm actually Vianey Romero, Director of Programs at Mixteca on behalf of Lorena Kourousias. I will be presenting and testifying today.

I'm here to speak on the importance of providing services with dignity and compassion and love to new asylum seekers and migrants. As an immigrant myself, I know the challenges (INAUDIBLE) of navigating many systems newly arrived to the United States. I arrived to the United States at the age of three (INAUDIBLE) factors forced my parents and I to leave our country and my well-being and safety were their number one priority. I am glad and proud of being part of Mixteca and working alongside with many Colleagues, and, as my Colleague from La Colmena has mentioned, it has truly been a team effort to work together and provide services to many new asylum seekers and migrants. At Mixteca, we provide resources and services with dignity and

empathy and heart. We have been present at Port Authority and welcomed new asylum seekers and migrants, and I will never forget that the first family I helped was a mom with her three-year-old son. It reminded me of when I first arrived with my mom at the age of three and how I wished someone had been there for my mom and myself, providing me with support and validating us as humans rather than a number and a burden to society. I'm beyond proud of being part of this team who we provide currently with direct services from emergency need of food to navigating school systems and workforce development like OSHA training, ESL classes, and skill building, serving three family shelters in our area. We're the only Latinx organization in the area. At Mixteca, we feel, we listen, and we connect, we provide with dignity and we love (INAUDIBLE) resources to not just the new asylum seekers and migrants but to our community members that are still struggling and surviving after the effects of COVID-19. Mixteca is a home away from home to many, and this crisis has been a struggle for all of us, for many non-profit organizations that with little to no resources at all have been a struggle for us to provide our services

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2 to our community members and new community members.

3 Thank you.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much. No
6 questions for this panel.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you so
8 much. Next, we will be calling Jodi Ziesemer followed
9 by Rex Chen then Ligia Guallpa and C. Mario Russell I
10 believe with Debra Presti. If you're in-person, you
11 can come up to the dais. Jodi, you can go ahead when
12 the Sergeant calls time.

13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

14 JODI ZIESEMER: Great. Thank you so much
15 for this opportunity to testify today.

16 My name is Jodi Ziesemer, and I am the
17 Director of the Immigrant Protection Unit at the New
18 York Legal Assistance Group. I just want to give a
19 little bit of context before we start with talking
20 about legal services and the need there.

21 The current crisis stems from federal
22 policies that closed our borders to most asylum
23 seekers over the last three years while failing to
24 put in place strategies or resources to safely,
25 effectively, and humanely anticipate the influx of

vulnerable migrants who cannot be subjected to rapid expulsion. This has created confusion and chaos at the border and really inconsistent treatment of asylum-seeking families. Because this population has no set destination or addresses when they arrive in the U.S., ICE and CBP do not know where to file court documents, they have no addresses, where to send followup paperwork, and they cannot effectively direct people to the resources they will need to navigate the removal process. Instead of confronting these barriers, ICE and CBP have employed a variety of deceitful and legally prejudicial policies such as fabricating addresses on charging documents, sending cases to far-flung jurisdictions, and supplying nonsensical or contradictory information and instructions. Funneling people to a small handful of sanctuary cities has also overburdened the systems in those cities, such as New York. Our ICE Enforcement and Removal Office, for example, is overwhelmed and people cannot even get access to the building, let alone the office where they are located to attend appointments.

I will also just mention that the federal government has elected to surveil and monitor these

migrants, often putting them on ankle monitors, on phone surveillance, GPS systems, and other enforcement mechanisms and has subjected all of them to removal proceedings instead of other options that they have at their discretion such as parole, which they have employed for Afghans and Ukrainians and other vulnerable populations.

The legal need really is twofold and must be addressed with two distinct programs and funding structures. The first is the need for information, individual engagement to provide guidance on the posture and next steps of the immigration process, and assistance in changing addresses and venue to New York City. Because of the deep confusion and inconsistencies and the nuances in individual cases, group orientations and general information packets are insufficient to address this need. Migrants want and need individual guidance and counsel on their options, next steps, and process. Although this information-giving should be overseen by legal employees, lawyers should not be the primary on-the-ground staff for this element of the response. The need is too great and too broad for staff line attorneys at non-profit legal service organizations

to cover, and it is not an effective use of the limited human resources in our city.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

JODI ZIESEMER: Okay. It is burnout work for attorneys. NYLAG has been at the Centers, and it is trying to give a stream of triage information without any ability to take on cases or actually provide representation is not sustainable.

I'll also just mention because this was talked about before. We are not assisting people actually applying for asylum or even beginning this process. We are basically giving basic triage information, and there needs to be more resources put in for actual representation.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you. Next, we will call on Rex Chen. You can go ahead when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

REX CHEN: Hello. My name is Rex Chen. I'm the Immigration Director at Legal Services NYC. Our non-profit provides free immigration legal services. I'm just going to make a few points.

One is that as Jodi was pointing, counting how many asylum seekers get some level of

legal assistance can be a limited measure because helping to get a little bit of help one day at a Navigation Center is very different from getting support for preparing their asylum and having a lawyer in court to win asylum, very different.

Another thing I want to emphasis is we've seen that with many traumatized asylum seekers, social workers support is extremely important in preparing a case. They've received trauma from what they're fleeing from, trauma from the travel to the U.S., and also trauma from mistreatment by the U.S. government and also by some states of the U.S. at the border and afterwards.

Jodi touched on how the work at the Navigation Centers is high risk of burnout. I just want to point out that even the later phases of the case and lawyers representing people seeking asylum is also an area where there have been a lot more studies in the last few years of the large amount of burnout and trauma for those representing asylum seekers all the way through to immigration court, and we've seen that it is actually difficult for us to retain staff in a healthy manner and also to recruit and hire new staff so that's important to understand

in the context of if we could just find the money,
can we just put it out there and there may be so many
people so eager we can just hire a ton of people,
that actually might be much more challenging than it
might seem on paper.

My last point I'll just highlight is just
give a feel for some things that are a bit unexpected
about what it is to work on an asylum case these days
in the dysfunctional immigration court system. One is
that cases take much longer than people would expect
to complete. There's a very large existing
immigration court backlog before the recent arrivals
of asylum seekers, and, as Jodi was referring to,
even just other parts of the process, checking in
with the deportation officers has a huge, massive
backlog and so there's even going to be a large
backlog even to start the immigration court case for
many of these asylum seekers. It could take four
years or more to resolve these cases so it's quite a
commitment and an important commitment to take on
these cases. As Jodi touched on, these cases are
harder to win than you might expect. That the
government writing bogus addresses of asylum seekers
that are supposed residences, they're tricking the

court to think that the notices they're mailing out are actually going to get to the asylum seekers. These add extra obstacles that you might not expect with these asylum cases.

Thank you very much for holding this hearing today.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you. Next, we'll move on to the people who are in-person. It doesn't look like Ligia is here. Mario, would you like to go ahead.

C. MARIO RUSSELL: Sure. Absolutely. Good afternoon or good evening. I noticed it's 10 after 5 so 10 minutes beyond your scheduled time I suppose, but I'll do my best to not add too many more minutes to your afternoon.

Chairwoman Hanif, nice to see you and thank you for hosting this meeting. I am Director of the Immigrant and Refugee Services with Catholic Charities Community Services and with me here is Debra Presti who is our Senior Director of Case Management with Catholic Charities.

In late April and May 2022, recently arriving asylum seekers from the southern border began to arrive at our administrative offices on

First Avenue where our Executive Management, human resources, and other fiscal functions are located. Many of those asylum seekers then arrived as we see now still disoriented, confused, and really effectively stripped of all of their personal belongings, holding nothing really but an immigration document that was often fraudulently and improperly issued as you've heard. Beginning at a just few individuals, over the months that number came to about 200 a week seeking assistance of all kinds, which we provided in that time on First Avenue in the frontline, food, basic needs supplies, legal screening of course, at least in the moment to triage what were the cases that needed particular attention. At our administrative offices alone and prior to our work at the Navigation Center, we saw over that period of time about 2,000 individuals, and, since the Navigation Center has opened its doors, basically I'm giving you data that's about four weeks' worth since the end of August, that number has risen to about 3,000, with 2/3 of the population being adults and the remainder of children.

With the arrival of buses, which we of course are so deeply and concernedly aware of, we

have choices to make. How we will welcome? How will we support those who come to us from afar seeking a home and protection?

I would say this simply. Yes, we've done a job of standing up some services, and we've begun it, I think, in earnest and as well as we can. We've heard, of course, many contours and shadows in that process, but we need to do more, and I think we need to do it with a long-term perspective. We are really on the cusp at some level, I think, of a change over time and how immigration and refugee policy will be administered and whether we've seen this through the experience with Syrian refugees, Afghan refugees, the Ukrainian parolees, unaccompanied children, we've seen all modes in which America receives those in need of protection and safety and now from the South. The welcome and resettlement is a 50-state issues. It's as much about the interior as it is about the border. It's as much about New York City as it is about El Paso, and I think we need to bend our imagination deeply and urgently in that way and think in the long-term.

To talk about just some needs or some migrants or some issues is not enough. We've been

doing this work in partnership, and we're very grateful to the City for the work we've done with them and the Council as well too, but I think it's time to step up our game and our response.

I just want to say four things that are specific to today's conversation and to what I think we need to do in order to move this forward better. Specifically, the Navigation Center in terms of legal support. On the legal side, the current RFP that we did not submit a proposal for is deficient, and it needs to be rethought. We need to divide it into two sections. One is group orientations, group know-your-rights informational sessions section and then a separate multi-year baseline legal representation program. Clearly, as you've mentioned yourself, Chairwoman, the case rate is unacceptable and the math does not work. This RFP is a band-aid proposal. I'm almost done.

Workforce development. If we think and are serious about welcoming refugees to our City then we have to enhance our OSHA Site Safety Training, we have to think about creative ways in which we can in fact plug so many talented people into perhaps, yes,

day economy, day gigs. We see this at our day laborer centers, but we can do more there.

At our Navigation Center, critical, and I think Debra can speak to this, the need for clothing, access to essential products, and, of course, transportation.

Finally, I would say this. We need your help in advocacy. I think the broader question about how can people work when they're here is key to this whole equation, and I think if we push and make a case for well-articulated policies around humanitarian parole that become a predicate for employment then maybe we can start to think something differently going forward. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much. A question I have is just so folks who are still watching and we have this on the record, we've talked a lot about the asylum process being one that is a tedious one, it is a multi-year wait. Can Jodi, Rex, and Mario, either one of you can chime in, describe what the asylum process is like right now?

JODI ZIESEMER: I'm happy to take that on. I think part of the issue is that this process is not functioning the way even that it is set up to

function because of the confusion at the border, and so in an ideal situation, somebody comes in, they're issued a charging document that is filed in court, they have a hearing in which they can file an application for asylum as a defense from deportation, and then have a trial where they present evidence and have to bear the burden to show their eligibility for this type of relief. That in and of itself is a burdensome and cumbersome process that, as many of my Colleagues have mentioned, really requires a lawyer in order to successfully navigate. The problem right now is that even that process is getting delayed, is getting off-track because of the confusion at the border, because of the overwhelming numbers, and because this federal administration has elected to place everyone in an overburdened court system so people are not even being given their charging documents, are not being given court appointments in a consistent manner, and they're not even having a forum in which to file their asylum application.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: What are the conditions for denying asylum? Could it be possible that everybody who's arrived from Venezuela applies for asylum gets rejected?

JODI ZIESEMER: Asylum is often very political in terms of how we adjudicate cases. I think our main concern, and this is not ineligibility if somebody actually goes through a trial and is able to fully present their claim, but that there are so many administrative missteps that can cause somebody to get an order of deportation without the opportunity to actually present and fully have their asylum application heard.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: What are those conditions?

JODI ZIESEMER: If somebody fails to receive a hearing notice because Immigration at the border has made up an address for them or is sending their notices to the Catholic Charities administrative offices or because they have their case filed in Utah, even though they're being on a bus to New York City, if they miss that court hearing they will be ordered removed in absentia without the opportunity to apply for asylum. If they don't file their application for asylum within one year of their arrival in the United States, that can be a barrier for them receiving relief. There's a number of other concerns.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Would you say that it poses an issue that the folks who are going to live or stay at a HERRC or are currently staying at a shelter could potentially miss mail coming to them about their case?

JODI ZIESEMER: Yeah, that is a concern that we have. NYLAG has been at the Navigation Center along with Catholic Charities and other service providers, we are providing change of address to notify courts for people who actually have their cases already filed in court of where they can receive mail, but, of course, in the shelter system it is I think both difficult to receive mail in a shelter but also the movement of people between shelters and the obligation to update the court after every single move and then to receive mail can definitely cause people to miss their hearings, to miss mailings, and to cause like I was talking about really to derail the whole process for their asylum case.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

REX CHEN: If I could add a little.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Yeah, go for it.

REX CHEN: I agree with Jodi. Another way you can lose your asylum case is you don't follow the specific strange instructions only in English to prepare for the hearing such as mailing certain pages of your asylum applications to the Nebraska Service Center. I know you're not following me. It's a very weird process. Also, critical is having evidence to support your case, and if the border officials threw your stuff out, the U.S. officials threw it out when you came through the border or you lose it in the course of being moved around to different shelters, your case is going to be in much harder shape. Another issue, people have written about refugee roulette, is that traumatized asylum seekers often will say slightly inconsistent things, and the danger there is judges who are very much against these immigrants have the discretion to say I just don't find this person believable, and there's so much discretion because no traumatized person can tell their story perfectly every single time they have to tell it. There's a lot of ways that people can lose their cases.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. Did you have a final comment?

C. MARIO RUSSELL: Yeah, I wanted to add that I think there's also the arc of the case and I think if we think that a person who is navigating this time period is unemployed then that is a further shackling and a binding of them to really no way to move forward. Frankly, if a person were to come into my office today, it probably wouldn't be for another six months that they can actually get a lawyer, and I'm saying that somewhat conservatively. After that, probably three to six months before they can actually file an application for asylum. After that, it's 150 days before they can submit a work authorization request and then after that it's about 8-1/2 to 12 months before they actually get the card. When you add all that up, you're looking at two to two-and-a-half years before a person from today can actually legally work. That in itself existentially I think adds to all of these problems and these conditions.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you for elaborating. That is very, very helpful to know, and I'll definitely be reaching out individually to just get a better understanding on the legal ramifications here and just how critical it is for us to have

funding allocated that really meets the need of every single case. No more questions for this panel.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

Next, we will be calling Ilze Caroline Thielmann followed by Judith Goldner, Vianey Romero-Mendez, and Siya Hegde. You can go ahead whenever you're ready.

ILZE CAROLINE THIELMANN: Thank you. Good afternoon. I'm Ilze Thielmann. I am the Director of Team TLC NYC. You've heard quite a bit about our activities at the Port Authority today, and I'm glad to finally be able to give our perspective on what has been going on down there.

We have been the only non-profit at Port Authority along with one other group for the last several weeks. A lot of organizations have testified that they have been at Port Authority, and that's true, but they have been for a few weeks at a time. We have been there since day one, since before the City was there, since before the City ever took a part in greeting and helping these migrants, Team TLC was on the ground and then the City has been playing catch-up ever since to be honest with you.

My partners at Port Authority who have been there day-in, day-out, we are literally there

seven days a week and I try to be there six days a week, but my partners are there seven days a week. Team TLC is always there. It was mentioned earlier, Artists-Athletes-Activist. Power Malu is the individual who is there literally every single day. I don't know how he does it, and Adama Bah, who's also been mentioned here, she is an equal partner among Artists-Athletes-Activists and Team TLC. She is a powerhouse and hopefully she'll be able to come here and testify today. These three partners are the ones who are every day down there greeting, feeding, clothing, assisting these people. Rest assured that every single person who has been reticketed to another city was reticketed by Team TLC. Team TLC NYC is the one who is sending these people to meet with their families, whether it be by an Uber, whether it be by a bus, a train, a plane, we are the ones who are reuniting those families through that transport. The City has testified earlier today people are getting transported from the Welcome Center at Port Authority. They're being transported by me, sometimes literally by me, because we have no funding. We have zero funding from the City, from the State, from the Feds, from anybody. We are getting grants that are

being given to us by other charitable organizations, and we are bearing the burden of relocating these people to be with their families.

It's interesting because there was also a mention of the DHS program to relocate people when they need to be in other cities to be with their families, and that system does not work. I don't know of anybody who has gone to a DHS shelter and has been relocated. In fact, two days ago I got a text from a city employee saying the Queens Borough President has a family that is in a shelter in Queens and they would love for you to help them get to Chicago. This actually happened. I said how can they even ask that when I've been begging for funding and then the Queens Borough President's office asked me to send these people to Chicago and I said you know what, that's what we do, please come down, and I said to the representative of the Queens Borough President's office I don't know how the office has the audacity to do this, however, and then the person said we have no funding, and I said I have no funding. Team TLC has no funding. We are deeply, deeply in the red. We have about, I wrote it down, I just checked my bank balance, \$1,642.72 in the bank at the moment and

every last penny of that plus about 20,000 grand is owed to me, to my volunteers, to other people who have helped out so we are deeply in the red and yet the Queens Borough President is asking me to send these people to Chicago, which I did, and it went on my AmEx, my personal AmEx, so what we really need obviously to be able to keep doing this is funding, we need funding, and the City has not stepped up in any way, shape, or form. The City has not bought a donut at the Port Authority for these people. The City has not put a person in a cab and paid for it. My organization is doing all of that. Artists-Athletes-Activists are doing the legwork and making sure these people are getting into the shelters and doing the troubleshooting after people are in the shelters and get kicked out in the middle of the night. Adama Bah is on the phone all day, I don't know when she sleeps, she's on the phone all day, every day, running around trying to help people who have been kicked out of this broken, broken shelter system and she will hopefully be here soon to testify as to how broken that system is. I just want to address some things. That's kind of what I prepared to say, but I wanted to address some of the things

that were said here earlier by the administration.

The administration says that the reason why they're opening this tent camp is because they need the time

to be able to triage these people and the work that

is being done at the Port Authority is just not

working, it's not the right place for it. Well,

that's ironic because when we are at the Port

Authority doing this work, the only reason why we

ever have any problems with getting the work done is

a) the funding, and, of course, we just go into our

own pockets to address that problem, and b) that we

are being rushed by city employees to wrap it up and

get these people out of here. I was told today that

if somebody is going to be picked up by their family

member, they have one hour, one hour for that family

member to get there and pick them up and get them out

of there because why, I still don't understand why.

You heard a bunch of times today we have 45 minutes

to an hour to triage these people and do what needs

to be done. There is no such time limit. The Port

Authority is not putting a time limit on the time we

spend with these people. The City is doing that.

Every day I am pulling people off lines that are

being taken out to be brought to the shelter, people

whose family members are on their way, people who I am trying to send to Chicago, people I am trying to triage because they are in the LGBTQ community and should not be put into the general population. I have to go and like physically pull people off the line because the city employees are trying to just get them out the door in that 45 minutes to one hour time period so when the City says it's not working at Port Authority and we need to have 96 hours to figure out what happens with these people, it makes me want to either laugh or throw up because they're the ones who are putting time limits on what we do at the Port Authority. If they gave us the funding and the space and time, I don't mean space but just get out of our way, stop trying to interfere, and the time to do it, it would be a lot more successful, and it has been very successful. We have reunited many, many, many families physically at the Port Authority despite the City's best efforts to get us the hell out of there when we're trying to get people there to be reunited, we've sent them to other cities. I don't even have the numbers, but yesterday I think there were 25 families who were reunited there at Port Authority. Every day we're sending 20 people to other cities to

be reunited with their families, and I don't understand the imperative that the City seems to feel to get these people rushed off to the shelter when all we're hearing today is how overburdened the shelter system is. Why would we send people to the shelter when they have family they can be with? Why is the City not paying the 135 dollars it takes to get somebody on a bus to Chicago and choosing instead to have them placed in a shelter where they're paying 135 dollars a day to keep them there? Why are they sending family members to different shelters so that you can spend 135 dollars a day here and 135 dollars a day there instead of putting the families together in a family shelter where it costs 190 dollars a day to keep the family together? I'm perplexed at the logic behind we're going to separate families, we're going to put them in this absurd tent camp, and that's supposed to be a solution. That's not the solution. We have come up with a solution. We just need the City to support the solution that we have and to provide the funding, to provide the assistance, to stop interfering, and to get out of the way.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

SIYA HIGDE: Hi. Good afternoon, Chair Hanif, Staff Members of the Council who've supported this very, very important hearing today. My name is Siya Hegde. I'm here as Housing Policy Counsel to the Bronx Defenders. We are a holistic legal public defender organization that serves over 20,000 clients across the Bronx in various legal system contacts. I'm here to speak from an intersectional frame. The political weaponization of newly arrived asylum seekers in our city is not only an indictment of our system of immigration and social services, but it is a multi-system failure of government at every level. The right to shelter in New York City continues to be under assault. Since the courts articulated it in the 1979 Callahan decision, successive mayoral administrations and City Councils have created all kinds of costly and easily exploitable systems of temporary shelter that do not provide homeless individuals and families with meaningful, safe affordable housing solutions. The result is a city with over 60,000 New Yorkers who sleep in temporary shelters including over 15,000 children, a city with nearly 43,000 vacant housing units across all its five boroughs, and while laws and policies have been

passed with the intent to make this human warehousing system humane, there are countless stories that we can add to what has already been said about how basic rights to food, water, linguistic, and transportation services and public assistance never materialize. Sadly, this result is not unexpected. The people who need housing and care the most including newly arrived migrants belong to a disproportionate demographic of black and brown children with children. Not only do they continue to suffer the harms of heightened xenophobia and racial biases in the wake of this humanitarian crisis but through government intervention and neglect they are over-surveilled, policed, and caged as political pawns. As just one example, city officials as we've heard are in the process of turning a Bronx parking lot into a temporary encampment zone, and there is clearly no plan in place as to where the thousand or so estimated migrants will be permanently housed. We are troubled by reports of proposals to increase the NYPD presence in the area as a response to the creation of an encampment, and this is in a community that's already faced severe divestment of resources. This type of temporary human warehousing must be abolished

as it does not meet any commonsense definition of a right to shelter. We ask that the Council find the courage to do something truly transformational, rather than spend money criminalizing poverty. In the short-term, it must use every means it has to turn vacant units into housing for asylum seekers and homeless New Yorkers, and in the long-term it must use its budgetary and legal powers to create a real capital plan for building safe, affordable, permanent, and dignified housing for all. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you both so much, and I really do wish that the administration was here to listen to you, but this is all recorded so we will make sure that they receive this.

Ilze, could you speak more about how much money has gone into reticketing?

ILZE CAROLINE THIELMANN: I would say at this point it's approximately 80,000 to 85,000 dollars, and that also includes Ubers to get people to where they're going here in the city or over the New Jersey border or something like, but it's been a lot of money. I haven't had the time to gather up my receipts and give a final total, but the 60,000 dollars that was quoted earlier was just through the

beginning of September or the end of August so we're much further along now and the money is going out much more quickly than it's coming in.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Reticketing, this refers to plane fare, train, Uber?

ILZE CAROLINE THIELMANN: Yeah, reticketing, we generally call plane, train, and bus, but I'm saying we have spent more than just that segment of getting someone to a different city. We've also spent additional dollars on Ubers and taxis and things like that.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I know you've made appeals and have asked for funding from the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. Could you share what those conversations have looked like?

ILZE CAROLINE THIELMANN: Generally what we're told is yes, we know, you absolutely deserve it, you absolutely deserve to have some money, we're working on it, we're working on it, we're going to connect you with people, etc. The main response that has borne any fruit is that some people from MOIA have connected me with United Way, which of course is not a city agency, so I've recently been awarded a grant from United Way. I don't even know how much

that is, but that's hopefully going to get us through a couple more weeks, and we've also received a grant from Save the Children, another non-profit obviously, so we've been talking to MOIA for nine weeks about needing some funding and basically what we're told is we'll try to figure it out, you have to be a contractor, you have to submit for an RFP and, of course, we're competing with organizations like Catholic Charities and the Red Cross who are huge and already well-funded and are able to front a certain amount of money to, for example, open up this Navigation Center and so they were granted millions of dollars to do this. They were also given millions of dollars to provide legal services, and, yet, we have people who we have seen at Port Authority who then go to the Navigation Center, are given a slip of paper that says come back in 10 days or 13 days or whatever and they come back and tell us that they have been told at the Navigation Center if you go back to Port Authority they'll help you over there so this multimillion dollar center that is being funded with taxpayer money is sending people back to little old Team TLC and Artists-Athletes-Activists and Adama Bah who finally, I'm so glad that you guys

(INAUDIBLE) because you have to hear from these incredible individuals, but we are being burdened even after Catholic Charities and the Red Cross is given all this money to open this Navigation Center, they come back to us and they seek more help and, guess what, we give it to them. We always give it to them. Not only are we ready, willing, and able to give it to them, we are oftentimes in conflict with the city employees at the Port Authority because we wish to give them this assistance. We are told, listen, you can't keep having these people come back. It's not like we're inviting them back. They're coming back because they know this is the one place or one of the few places that they come back and actually get assistance so the city employees are telling us you're messing with our numbers, this is just going to delay things further, and we say what are we here for, we're here to help asylum seekers, we're going to help asylum seekers, and you can work with us or you can work against us but we're going to do it with or without your help so that is what we have been up against for weeks, and the audacity for people to ask us for more help or to try stand in the way of our helping these asylum seekers who are

seeking that help or to try to rush us out the door and get these people to shelters when they should be with their families and then to sit here, to have the Mayor's Office sit here and talk about all these incredible things that they're doing for asylum seekers, and I'm shaking my head the entire time because they're not doing it, they're not providing these services, they're certainly not providing them at Port Authority, they've left us behind at Port Authority, and this Navigation Center is really, you have to win a lotto to get any assistance there because you have to get an appointment, you can't get an appointment online, you show up, you get sent away, and there's no help for these people. They go there and they say I need legal help, I have an ICE check-in coming up, I have an asylum appearance that's coming up, I need legal help, and they're told come back in 10 days when their ICE check-in is in three days so they come back to us, and, with no funding and with the City trying to stop us from helping these people, we're facing an uphill battle. If the city would just give us the funding and give us the assistance and we need people who care about these people, who are not seeing them as a problem to

be shunted off to the shelters. We are dealing with people who really just seem to be interested in one thing and one thing only, just getting them out of the way as soon as possible, and that's not what we do, and we're not going to allow the City to stand in the way of our doing what we do, but it'd be really nice if they would stop trying to stand in our way.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. No more questions.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you. Next, we will be calling Anne Pillsbury followed by Patrick Boyle, Terry Lawson, and Juan Diaz. Anne, you can go ahead when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

ANNE PILLSBURY: Hi. Thanks for inviting all of us to this hearing. The Central American Legal Assistance, we've been helping Central American asylum seekers for about 30 years, and, even though there are a lot of defects in the City's response, I have to say that all of our clients that came across the border probably spent their first few nights in the city sleeping on the trains so it's nice to see everybody working together trying to come up with a solution to help this artificially created surge in

people, but most of us have been working with this same population for many, many years. We all have to take a deep breath and step back and try to understand the process a little better. I appreciate the fact everyone's been referring to everybody as an asylum seeker, but the sad fact is that it's a mixed population. Some of them are what the law recognizes as legitimate asylum seekers, and they have a chance at winning their cases. The majority probably aren't, and so the real tough problem here is trying to figure out who has a shot at asylum and who doesn't. There are a lot of legitimate reasons people leave their home countries from a human standpoint, and it's right that we should try to welcome them here as neighbors, but in terms of deploying legal services we have to focus on people that under our narrow statutes have a shot at asylum and that's probably only about 20 percent of the people that we have had landed on our doorstep so how we identify them and then how we help them is really tricky because those of us that do free legal services are already swamped helping this same population, the Central Americans, the Venezuelans, the Nicaraguans are mostly the people that we see. Now, it's statutory. It's not a

matter of will, but you cannot get work authorization when you're newly arrived. You cannot get work authorization unless and until you apply for asylum, and that, of course, invites a perverse incentive to apply for asylum even if you're not eligible. Most of the legal service providers won't do that. We want to make sure it's a legitimate case before we apply, but they're still going to wait as Mario Russell pointed out many, many months before they're going to have work authorization so that's just a non-starter. That's statutory, and we can't change that. The one-year filing deadline is statutory, and we can't change that, unless we get control of Congress and life gets much, much better, but we have to work with the realities that we're...

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

ANNE PILLSBURY: Up against because we can't represent everybody, and the RFP the City put out was ill-conceived...

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much.
Could you wrap up?

ANNE PILLSBURY: Yeah. We need to work more closely together with the Mayor's Office to come up with a realistic way to provide legal services.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

Next, we're going to call Patrick Boyle. You can go ahead when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

PATRICK BOYLE: Thank you to the Chair and to the Members of this Committee.

My name is Patrick Boyle. I'm an Assistant Vice President for Public Policy for Volunteers of America. We are a non-profit dedicated to ending homelessness in the New York region by 2050, and we run four family shelters, an intake assessment shelter, a number of DV shelters, and other transitional housing where bebx over the summer we started to see a large number of asylum-seeking and migrant families coming to our shelters in need of services, and we immediately got to work on these folks that we are proud and honored to be serving them, many of whom have come from unspeakably difficult circumstances and a really arduous journey to get here, so we thank the Council's attention to this issue. We also just want to give a thanks and some attention to the DHS team who have been working under incredibly difficult circumstances so we do

want to acknowledge our government partners in this as well as the Council for all of the attention that you're bringing to this and to the individual Council Members who have been very helpful to us where we have had sites that a lot of these folks coming through in their Districts.

I don't really have anything beyond what you've heard today, but I just want to acknowledge and sort of second a lot of what has been said in terms of the need. We have immediate needs for essential items, toiletries, culturally appropriate foods, kitchenware, clothing, a lot of these people have come here with just the clothes on their backs so we look forward to a coordinated effort by the City to really link donations and philanthropic efforts with non-profit providers like us. We really need that ramped up, and we need it very quickly. Of course, longer term we're going to have a need for a greatly bolstered legal services infrastructure to meet the needs of these families who are here applying for this. Everyone we're trying to partner with right now, as you've heard time and again, is very over-subscribed and under-capacity for that.

We also stand ready to work with the federal government, our Congressional representatives on anything that we can be advocating for from a federal perspective, whether it's funding or whether it's policy changes to help process folks, whatever is needed from the advocate community to really push for, please use us and other non-profit partners like us to help advocate. We're going to need a major response to this as a humanitarian crisis, and we know it's going to take some federal help.

Again, everything I've said you've heard from many other speakers today. I just want to say that it is our mission and our honor to serve these people, it's been challenging for us as a provider and certainly for the City...

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

PATRICK BOYLE: Looking forward to partnering with everybody to make it a positive...

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

PATRICK BOYLE: For these families.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

Next, we will go to Juan Diaz. You can go ahead when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

JUAN DIAZ: Thank you, Chair Hanif and City Council Immigration Committee, for holding today's.

My name is Juan Diaz, and I am a Policy and Advocacy Associate at Citizens' Committee for Children, a multi-issue children's advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe. Over 3,000 asylum-seeking children and their families have recently arrived in New York City seeking safety and an opportunity to have a better life. The city's housing crisis, lack of shelter capacity, and fiscal constraints have further exacerbated their struggle. We applaud the City's effort to establish a migrant Navigation Center and to partner with community-based organizations to open more. However, so much more must be done to adequately address the urgent needs of asylum-seeking families. As we all know, families are struggling in DHS shelters due to lack of Spanish language access, school supplies for their children, clothing, cash aid, and legal assistance just to name a few fundamental resource barriers. Earlier this week, over 80 migrant children residing in a DHS

shelter were added to a District 10 Bronx elementary school. These children lacked essential school supplies and clothes. Teachers and school officials generously purchased a few essential items, and community-based organizations like the New York Immigration Coalition stepped in to help. However, community-based organizations have limited resources and need the City's help. It is critical that the City develop a robust and coordinated approach to the provision of emergency support services for these migrant families. The City must fund and provide essential items such as clothes, toiletries, cash assistance, and transportation assistance, ensure that all contracted programs have access to translation services, both written and verbal. As many partners have said, the City needs to fund legal assistance for these migrant families as the immigration system is very difficult and complex. Additionally, intracity communication must be improved to connect migrant families with services and social supports. For the long-term solution to improve the well-being of migrant families, the CityFHEPS voucher eligibility should be expanded to include undocumented households. The City must also

proceed with the hiring of shelter-based community coordinators as critical liaisons between families, shelters, and school personnel for all homeless families.

Additionally, the City must (INAUDIBLE) more stops needed for city social services in all areas of the civic government. To this end, the 90-day rule of shelter stay prior to CityFHEPs eligibility must end in order to move families from shelter to permanent housing quickly.

As a formerly undocumented immigrant from Ecuador who arrived at the age of 12 to New York City, I understand the struggles to assimilate to a new culture...

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

JUAN DIAZ: I had the existence of family and social networks. Thank you so much. I look forward to submitting our written testimony.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you so much. Chair, do you have anything.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: No questions.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

We'll move on to the next panel. We'll call Peter Malvan, Ariadna Phillips, Adama Bah, and Power Malu.

ARIADNA PHILLIPS: Ariadna Phillips, South Bronx Mutual Aid, part of the Mutual Aid Collective. The Mutual Aid Collective, which includes many mutual aids, allies, faith communities, and autonomous activists working alongside arriving migrants, has been handling ongoing care and support for thousands of asylum-seeking migrants since early August every day. We have spent tens of thousands in crowdfunds on food, phones, migrant transportation, medical care access, medications, essential supplies, home goods, clothing, supply transport, 24-hour rapid response for those left unsheltered by the city, legal and court services, workforce preparation, support for queer refugees, family reunification travel, and sanctuaries across the city as well as respite sites. This does not account for the endless translation work and thousands of hours of unpaid general labor. We have done this completely outside the scope of government and affiliated nonprofits as unpaid organizers in coalition with arriving asylum seekers. We do not, on principle, partner with racist and harmful entities. Before asylum seekers arrive in New York, most have their identity documents taken from them at the border by immigration officials, many are

forcibly separated from their families without phones to even know where they are. Migrant families and individuals have been consistently abandoned to our care outside of Port Authority and outside shelter intake. This includes emergency medical transport upon their arrival, which we coordinate and do accompaniment to city hospitals as many who are arriving are injured and ill from Texas detention encampment centers, which according to migrants the new Orchard Beach encampment closely resembles. We tirelessly pick up asylum seekers that have not known where to go and were left on the streets walking to addresses printed on immigration documents, churches and shelters that have no idea who they are. Dozens of migrants have attempted to walk from city airports in areas like Newark, LaGuardia, JFK, and White Plains who we find and escort to safe shelter. It is through this organizing we have realized the depth and breadth of shelter abuse and general negligence to all unhoused New Yorkers. Belongings are constantly stolen or repossessed by shelter staff, including in some cases immigration paperwork. Queer asylum seekers are often assaulted and now within our sanctuaries. We have heard from hundreds of migrants

that they prefer to sleep on the streets than in the shelters because of the danger. Despite the omnipresence of DHS police, migrants trying to report abuse in shelters are told simply to vacate the shelter. Migrants have been beaten and tased by large groups of shelter police and NYPD in retaliation for speaking out. Families, including mothers, have been explicitly threatened by shelter officials for reporting ongoing trafficking and other corruption that occurs with simply the blessing of certain shelter officials. When we speak to recently arriving migrants outside Port Authority, in some cases they're only given information on how to get to a shelter. They did not get to the multimillion dollar Navigation Center. According to an arriving migrant, it felt like the city shook his hand, took his photo, and he was led through the back. The Navigation Center is of little use to migrants if they can't get there and they don't even know it exists. There's over a month wait for appointment and only 25 people can be seen a day. Countless others walking for hours to assigned shelters are often sent again and again to different locations, told there are no beds available, and they walk back across boroughs. They

sleep on floors in waiting rooms from early morning until late at night. The food they receive in the shelter is frozen. At PATH shelter intake, they are bused in the middle of the night, told to walk across boroughs with their children without support and made to leave again at 7 in the morning only to spend the whole day and evening sent back to PATH again over and over, pregnant women and children.

We testify here today to give you a sense of the gaps and, frankly, abuses in shelter, food, safety, and dignity that thousands of asylum seekers have faced upon arrival in our city. There is nothing humanitarian about the existing shelter system, and the plan to place migrants in outdoor tents in flood zones as the temperature drops is cruel and potentially fatal. We are here to say our city must do far better. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

Next, we'll go to Peter Malvan.

KARIM WALKER: Thank you. Peter's not here so I'm going to speak on his behalf. Thank you, Committee Chair Hanif and to the City Council, for holding this important hearing and the opportunity

for us to testify in front of you today. My name is Karim Walker, and I work for the Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center. We are submitting detailed written testimony, but we feel it's imperative that we get the verbal testimony to you as quickly as possible.

Since the new administration came into office in January, we have witnessed a steady, increasingly aggressive assault on homeless people across the five boroughs. The construction of a refugee camp through the creation of a giant tent in a flood-prone zone on the margins of the Bronx as we move into fall and winter clearly indicate that this is a runaround. These plans are clearly intended to undermine the city's sacrosanct right to shelter, something that's been in place for four decades and that countless thousands of homeless New Yorkers have relied upon. This is yet another effort by the City to hide rather than help people of color as well. The city is scapegoating migrants as the cause of the homelessness crisis that they failed to manage. The city has seen an increase in asylum seekers, but we've also seen eviction, domestic violence, and affordability crises that are causing large numbers

of people to enter the shelters. Moreover, by creating a new system only for asylum seekers, the Mayor is clearly opening the door for providing lesser care to those in need. There is nothing human about the City's plan. In fact, it's downright barbaric. What the City is doing is part of a long line of efforts by different Mayors to try to limit access to DHS shelters rather than focus on getting homeless people into permanent housing, the only true solution to addressing homelessness. The Mayor has available to him significant housing resources such as HPD, NYCHA, and elsewhere as well as the ability to challenge widespread source of income discrimination that workers routinely use. The City could also prioritize placement of people into permanent housing in all these ways. They could also open new hotels and facilities as they did during COVID in response to the pandemic when people need to get out of congregate shelters. They could this, but instead of having to talk about the painful reality of them opening shelters in a flood-prone zone on a parking lot in the margins of the city as we enter the winter season, our cooler temperatures.

(INAUDIBLE) thousands of people have been shoved

(INAUDIBLE) subways, into the streets by city agencies, DHS, NYPD, Sanitation, Parks, etc., though very few have gotten housing. Our office works with homeless individuals who sleep on subways and in encampments and in the shelters. We know firsthand that these sweeps end up with people losing key belongings, chief among them medical and paperwork such as their birth certificates, maybe even their IDs. Thank you again.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

Again, you can all submit longer testimony. We accept written testimony up to 72 hours after the hearing.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much for being here with us since 11 or earlier when we started the rally so I see you and I deeply, deeply appreciate all the work that you're doing.

KARIM WALKER: My pleasure, Councilwoman.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

Next, we will move to Adama Bah followed by Power Malu.

ADAMA BAH: Can you hear me? Hi. My name is Adama Bah. I'm an immigration advocate. I'm also formerly undocumented. When I first heard about these buses, it was very important for me to step up and

assist because I knew the City would fail these folks like they have failed me. I'm going to talk about what's going on in DHS. I sat here and listened to a lot of lies that DHS has said. These migrants are being abused by DHS. The process of what happens is once they leave Port Authority where we are every day, they will shuttle them to the shelter where they're then sitting there for hours, sometimes 17 hours sitting, just waiting for intake. Once they are done with intake, they are given a one-way Metro card, instructions in English how to get to their destination. They are not instructed how to get there in another language at all. Once they get there to the shelter that they're supposed to be at, they're told there's no bed for them. They must leave, and they're escorted by DHS police. If they do not leave, NYPD is called on them, and folks leave because they cannot risk being arrested because they are not undocumented, they're still asylees waiting to be processed. Once they leave these facilities, they are asleep in the streets. They are calling my team, they are calling South Bronx Mutual Aid, they're calling EmPower, they're calling (INAUDIBLE) and they're asking us to pick them up. We have been in the

streets until 1 a.m. trying to house these folks. We have 18-year-old migrants with adult males in the shelter. They're so many ongoing safety issues at this DHS shelter. I have sent countless emails to every elected official for help, but I am constantly ignored and told that this is not going on. DHS has been truly in denial about what's going on. African migrants aren't allowed on these Abbott buses so when they do arrive, which they are arriving in other routes, they're not adequately being taken care of. Their halal meals are not being taken care of. Their dietary needs are not being taken care of. Their religious needs are not taken care of. Another issue that's happening in DHS shelter is clothing. These migrants are coming off the buses with just the clothing on their backs, sometimes short and flip-flops. For weeks they would have the same thing on with no support. These DHS shelters do not have social services or social worker to work with them. The City has not prepared for this. There is no social service for undocumented folks, and we're trying to build that but we're met with a lot of pushback. Being kicked out is constantly a thing. Every 10 days, undocumented folks have to recertify.

If they do not recertify, they are kicked out of the shelter. We had two migrants that were kicked out of the shelter last night at midnight. The migrants, themselves, recorded the interaction because no one believed them as to what is going. The Welcome Center is not so welcomed because they're being returned back to us for us to help them. We have proof of everything that we're saying. We have countless pictures, videos, and emails so I'm upset and you can hear it in my voice because they're making me sound like I'm a lunatic, but we're not. We're advocating for folks who have been silenced.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

Power, you can go ahead.

POWER MALU: My name is Power Malu. I represent Artists-Athletes-Activists based in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Our team has been at the Port Authority almost I'm going to say every day, you hear my voice like this because it's a result of constantly trying to advocate for the migrants, the asylum seekers that are coming in. At the same time, when they do arrive on the bus, we are not sugarcoating anything. We are letting them know that their journey has been and unfortunately it's going

to continue to be long here in New York City because we say that we are a sanctuary city and as representatives of New York City we have to make sure that we advocate for these people and we tell them the truth and they are faced with a lot of pushback. There's not enough translators at the centers. As Adama has been mentioning, we actually go to these spaces and we try to translate and we try to help out and we get met with aggression and pushback. We're not met with any kindness. We bring food to these places, and they rush people inside. They tell them they shouldn't be outside, go inside when they see us, they know who we are. We meet them with love and empathy at the Port Authority and we see that there's also a show that happens when a lot of politicians or whoever wants to take pictures with people, they come to this space to do that, and we want to make sure that it's not just hey, welcome to New York City and that's it. We're actually going to the airports, we're following up, we're going to Randall's Island to pick people up that are stranded, that are told at 11 p.m. that they have to go to another shelter or they're excuse is well, they arrived at 10 o'clock, we had this paper for them waiting at 5 o'clock. You

can't wait until the next morning. You know that these people are new into this country. After 10 p.m., we know as New Yorkers how messed up the train system is with all the train work that goes on so you're trying to tell these people how to get to another place where we know that they're going to get turned away. For us, it's all about how can we continue to represent New York City as it is put on the map and being told to the rest of the world that we do welcome people but yet we're pushing them away. When we're at the Port Authority, we provide food for them, we're asking other organizations to pull from their budgets to help us out, and that's all based off of the relationships that we have. We're providing food. As Team TLC has testified, we're helping to reticket people. We're doing all of this work that we don't have the funding to do but we have friends and resources that we're counting on to help us because we know that if we're not there, these people are going to be abandoned. They're going to be shipped and pushed into these buses from one bus to the next bus and then they're going to be left stranded in New York City trying to fend for themselves so all we're trying to do is represent

this city as it's supposed to be a sanctuary city, we're trying to do the right thing by these migrants because all of us are migrants. If you weren't born here 500 years ago and you didn't have family members that were here 500 years ago, you are an immigrant. I was born and raised in the Lower East Side, my parents were born in Puerto Rico, but I consider myself an immigrant and I tell that to these people, and I thank them for shining a light on the system that has been shambles. This housing system, the shelter system, we have unhoused people living on the streets because they'd rather live in the streets than in these shelters and now the migrants that are coming in are doing us all a favor by shining a light on this system that has had no accountability for years and years and years. Since I was about seven or eight years old, I remember my mom going to HRA to get food stamps and how they disrespected her because she didn't speak the language. Now, at my age, I'm going to these shelter systems trying to represent for these people and I see how they continue to be disrespected and I'm disrespected because at first they think that I'm coming for shelter and I say no, I'm trying to help you with this process. We know you

don't have translators here. I'm just trying to help you smooth out this process, and I'm still getting met with this disrespect and it's like we don't care, nobody's going to do anything to us no matter how many emails you send, nothing's going to happen. I'll just leave it at that. I'm very passionate and that's just off the top of my head but there's way more and we have film and footage and pictures to prove all the lies to debunk everything that they've been saying. They always say no, we provide beds to everybody, we provide clothing to everybody, we provide food to everybody then why is it that it takes these non-profit organizations, unfunded non-profit organizations to do their work.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I did want to learn a little bit more from Adama about the African migrants who I remember for several weeks were taken to a mosque, a community center, and then the community figured out a meal train and clothing and other expenses for them. Could you just speak a little bit more about how our African siblings are being treated in this process?

ADAMA BAH: Sure. African migrants are arriving in New York City just like the Venezuelans, but, once they arrive to Texas, they are held in detention center and then transferred to Atlanta detention center. Atlanta has a lot of strict rules. Once they are released at detention center, they are depending on black-led organizations to pay their way here. We pay for their flight and their buses here. Once they arrive, they are not welcomed in the shelter. There is no language access whatsoever. You do not have (INAUDIBLE) They will sit them to the side and tell them there's no way we can help you. They also turn them away from the shelter. Once they leave, they go to the mosque. There are thousands and thousands of African migrants sleeping at mosques. The borough that has the most African migrants is the Bronx, the second is Harlem, the third is Queens. I cannot say what mosques they are. There are only two mosques that said that I can tell which they are, but they're not being taken care of. They're depending on organizations like South Bronx Mutual Aid, EmPower, but they're just depending on the community to help them. The City has not assisted in any way for African migrants. (INAUDIBLE) for the Bronx.

2 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. No more
3 questions for this panel.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.
5 Again, any other testimony you have, you can
6 definitely email it over to us.

7 Moving on, we will call Terry Lawson
8 followed by Scott Hutchins, Charisma White, and
9 Dmitri Daniel Glinski. Terry, you can go ahead when
10 the Sergeant calls time.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

12 TERRY LAWSON: Good evening. My name is
13 Terry Lawson, and I'm Executive Director of UnLocal.
14 We provide community education, outreach, and legal
15 representation for New York City's undocumented
16 immigrant communities. Since we were founded 10 years
17 ago, we've always been devoted to advocating for
18 those seeking safety at our borders. I'm also the co-
19 founder and Steering Committee Member of the Bronx
20 Immigration Partnership. Thank you, Chair Hanif, the
21 Immigration Committee, and the Council for holding
22 this hearing.

23 As providers, it is critical that we
24 provide our communities with accurate and the most
25 up-to-date information as these puzzle pieces keep

shifting. While we applaud some of the centralized efforts testified about today, we have been forced to ask ourselves why it is taking the City so long to undertake an effort of this nature. Given the fact that, as Council Member Hanif shared many hours ago at the beginning of this hearing, we have always been a place where immigrants seek safety and stability. We ask why so many of these current efforts have been unfunded, under-resourced, and reliant on volunteer time. We know that the work of showing up for crises like these so often falls on BIPOC and impacted individuals who are too often underpaid and overworked. As providers of immigration legal services, we at UnLocal know that we operate in a racist and xenophobic system that causes harm and one that we sincerely hope will be abolished. As an organization, we refuse to perpetuate that harm by asking our staff, many of whom are BIPOC and impacted, to overextend themselves to meet a timeline to respond to a crisis created by political actors. We believe that the legal services RFP released by MOIA does not come close to covering the true cost of providing legal services the City says it plans to offer as Council Member Hanif noted. We heard Dr.

Long testify that legal services are provided at the asylum seeker Navigation Center, and, while we do applaud some of our Colleagues who have been working diligently there this past month, the RFP which we also did not submit a proposal for does not come anywhere close to funding legal services for the new immigrants in this city, certainly not for the 100 individuals per day as the RFP contemplates. I want to underscore the point made about the urgency of creating long-term plans made by both Council Member Gutierrez and Chair Hanif, and I also thank Chair Hanif for her questions regarding the RFP and looking forward to MOIA only answering them. We too are troubled by the low rates of funding and the rate of 250 per case and we know that that rate is going to plummet.

We disagree with Commissioner Iscol. This is not an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Those of us here today have been doing this work for decades. It's not unprecedented. The City's long overdue efforts covered here have been prompted by political wins and, while we understand that later is better than never, we again urge this administration to listen to the experts with deep experience, both here

and across the country, and specifically members of impacted communities, organizers, advocates...

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

TERRY LAWSON: Social workers, case managers, and educators. Almost done. We heard the Commissioner testify that they spoke with Bronx stakeholders on the same day they decided on the location of Orchard Beach, which is deeply concerning. The testimony regarding...

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

TERRY LAWSON: Separation of families goes to show how much trauma accompanies the migration patterns forced by our inhumane policies and our city agencies do not operate in a vacuum. This is a time that requires deep collaboration and coordination with community members and stakeholders and a critical rethinking of how we treat all immigrants in this city. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

We will move on to Scott Hutchins followed Charisma White and Dmitri Danile Glinski. You all can go ahead.

SCOTT HUTCHINS: I'm here testifying on behalf of myself and Neighbors Together. My name is

Scott Hutchins. I'm a formerly homeless physically disabled college graduate who has spent over eight years in the New York City shelter system. As a member-leader with Neighbors Together and other groups, I have advocated for homeless New Yorkers and vulnerable tenants across the state of New York. In 2018, I (INAUDIBLE) produced the Business of Homelessness of which I was the co-author about our recommendations for how the shelter system should change. We were ignored. I languished in the New York City shelter system for 99 months. I was verbally abused and intimidated in the shelter system, was impacted by unsanitary conditions and unhealthy food, developing gout, impetigo, high blood pressure, and high cholesterol, and I was once physically attacked by a fellow resident. I desperately wanted to get out of the shelter but couldn't. I was expected to leave without reliable employment and was given no help other than threats of failure to comply if I didn't apply for disability, which was consistently denied because I can do desk work if businesses would just respond to my applications. Faced with source of income discrimination and landlords who would not take my CityFHEPS voucher, I needed to seek the aid

of non-profits outside of the shelter system to finally secure housing. The homelessness crisis in the current context with asylum seekers are products of a lack of political will to make housing a human right in New York State. If we house New Yorkers in weeks instead of having individuals wait for years to secure housing like myself, the City would not be violating its right to shelter mandate with the vulnerable asylum seekers. If the shelter system is overcrowded, let's empty it. The City should house individuals quicker by vigorously combatting source of income discrimination and fixing issues with the CityFHEPS voucher. The City should end the 90-day rule that forces individuals to be in a shelter for three months before they can gain access to a CityFHEPS voucher. The City should get rid of utility allowance that lowers the purchasing power of the voucher making it harder to find an apartment. I applaud any effort to help asylum seekers gain access to social services, and I hope the Committee sees the link between the homelessness crisis we have been in for years and this influx of people into the shelter system. The City must create a voucher that works to effectively and efficiently move people into housing.

By fixing the issues with CityFHEPS, we could help combat overcrowding and needless delays with shelter stays. We can establish housing as a human right. This is a matter of if we have the political will to do so.

I would like to thank the Committee on Immigration for the time to testify today, and I want to say that all these sweeps and tent cities, the Mayor destroying people's property, that's fascist and it needs to stop.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you. Charisma, you can go ahead.

CHARISMA WHITE: Hello. My name is Charisma White. I'm here testifying on myself, Neighbors Together. I am a housing and homeless advocate for over seven years now. I have been in and out of shelter system myself since I was 16. The shelter system is overcrowded because the City of New York makes it extremely difficult for people like me to gain access to stable housing. Not because of migrants. If the City were able to house people quicker, it would free up shelter space to help vulnerable migrants. The City has to see the connection between homelessness crisis and it's

failure to address the current situation with migrants. It took me three years to find an apartment with a voucher in the New York City shelter system due to source of income discrimination. Shelters are supposed to be temporary facilities for emergencies. To have the voucher denied for years was extremely taxing on my mental health and my family. Because of that, I recently lost my son within the shelter system because he was in an abusive relationship and I referred the young man that was trying to stay with me in my household to SRO and he lured my son to his room and overdosed him. Most of these places they send you to and try to set you up in are not safe. They're separating families. Even if you have an adult child, he is still your family, and they might need to be in a family setting, not separated in shelters that are unclean, unsafe, and the staff is unscrupulous.

DMITRI DANIEL GLINSKI: All right. Thank you, Chair Hanif. Our American Russian-Speaking Association for Civil and Human Rights is the oldest active organization of political exiles from Russia including asylees and asylum seekers and their friends and allies from other post-Soviet countries.

Mostly for lack of time, I will limit my remarks to my own community picture in this overall bigger humanitarian and moral crisis, and I will address some things that are different in focus but this hearing is not just the best but perhaps the only place where our community can come and address this at this time.

Since I testified here in March, CBP reported 12,000 encounters with arrivals from Russia on the U.S./Mexican border only, and this is 95 times more than two years ago. This was before the exodus of the past 10 days as you might have read in the news. About a quarter to half of them are likely to end up in New York City or in the area. Yet, my community, the third largest linguistic minority in New York, is a social service desert. The CBOs that have their cultural competence, that know the community from the inside are not funded, have no staff, no volunteers to respond to this crisis. They certainly would be disqualified for any of the RFPs that were discussed, and we have that experience in the past. One of the major reasons for this situation is in fact the influence of the other kind of newcomers from my part of the world in this city in

the past 20 years, and these are the Kremlin-connected oligarchs and their local neighbors here who control the narrative and the logic of funding of anything related to Russian Americans. They invested billions plundered from my country, not just in Park Avenue houses, but in our most influential philanthropists and our politics to push their agendas and to silence those who are opposed their rule, deny them the opportunity to rise and to be heard in places like this. Just google, for example, the Genesis Philanthropy Group that was set up by the Kremlin's bankers right here in New York and how much it gave to (INAUDIBLE) and other agencies to buy that influence, and our people have seen this influence stay in power in social service agencies and local government offices from Brighton Beach to Washington Height and beyond wherever our people live and find the doors shut in their faces.

I have four recommendations for our City Council. One, urge our Department of Homeland Security to give TPS to Russians temporarily in the States who have not benefitted (INAUDIBLE) sanctioned entities. Start recognizing those Russian Americans who fought for peace, human rights, and justice back

home or our anti-war leaders in Russia who have a connection to New York such as the world famous political prisoner, Vladimir Kara-Murza. He spent a lot of time in our city. For full disclosure, he and I worked for the same employer here 10 years ago. Many in New York remember him warmly. Pass a resolution in his support. Make him an honorary citizen of New York. Hold hearings on the impact of the Kremlin-connected wealth and oligarchs and their enablers on our public life, on Russian-speaking community and how to mitigate these consequences. Set up an interfaith, interethnic task force on rebuilding social services from scratch for immigrants from Ukraine, Russia, and neighboring countries of the region so that our exiles, including many high-class professionals, could finally both get services and serve their community. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. Sorry that I had to step away. As you know, we've been here since 1 p.m. and neither of had breaks for the bathroom. I will follow and listen to your testimony, sorry I missed yours and the rest of yours, but no questions for this panel. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

Next, we will call Nara Milanich, David Miranda, Stephanie Rupp, and Yajaira Saavedra. I apologize if I killed anyone's name.

YAJAIRA SAAVEDRA: Hello. My name is Yajaira Saavedra. I am from La Morada Restaurant. We are a group of undocumented family that runs a restaurant in the Bronx. We have also been in the forefront of the immigration movement for decades. My brother famously self-deported to infiltrate the detention centers just to bring light on the abuses of the detention centers under the Obama administration so I personally know through my family history how much and through my own history as a Dreamer, as a DACA recipient, what it is to be undocumented and what it is to be abused by this country. I also know what a detention center looks like from the many detention centers my brother infiltrated and from just constantly advocating for immigrants across the nation. What is being built at Orchard Beach right now is a detention center, and I have little to no faith that after this is built that it will end there so it's scary to think the detention centers are now being allowed in sanctuary

cities. I also want to say that through my plight of doing radical changes in the immigration system I have yet to see Manuel Castro at the forefront with me so I find it odd that he is here as leading MOIA. I also questioned why is it that a small business like La Morada whose budget doesn't exceed 1 million, not even close to 1 million, we are still feeding migrants every single day, not at Port Authority because that's where we have been excluded, where we have been violently threatened that we will be arrested if we're at Port Authority so we go to the shelters because migrants call us and tell us that they haven't eaten in days so we visit them at the shelters, most of them are hotels, all over the city to bring hot meals and this is coming from our pocket, and our budget, again, does not exceed the millions, not even 1 million dollars, and you have all these not-for-profits who have close ties, personal and donor ties, to the Mayor receiving millions of dollars, and they are doing a whole lot less than we are. We are working close to the South Bronx Mutual Aid and the Mutual Aid Collective so everything that we do we have receipts, we have proof of, we have been present at shelters. Just yesterday

I was at a shelter hotel near LaGuardia Airport and counted easily four migrant children who had high fevers and were asking for medication and this is us, continuing to be in the frontlines providing whatever help we can immediately with our own budgets, not receiving any help from the federal government, from the state government, and being excluded in all ways by MOIA.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

DAVID MIRANDA: Hi. My name is David Miranda, and I am the Senior Staff Attorney at Covenant House New York.

I would like to thank the Committee for allowing me to testify today. I am here on behalf of the entire Covenant House community. Please refer to my written testimony for more information on Covenant House.

I do want to talk about the effect of the crisis on young people, particularly the young people that we serve who are experiencing homelessness and are under 21. We are proud to be on the frontlines at Covenant House, helping these vulnerable young people by providing food, safety, shelter, and other essential services. We are grateful to be able to

help, but we are finding that the situation is stretching the available resources available in New York, especially with immigration legal services. Our proximity to Port Authority and our youth-specific focus lead us to be an obvious choice. Those who are already staying with us will go to Port Authority to meet the arriving buses and bring back groups of youth in the hopes that we have available beds. Other times, youth are first referred to churches or shelters in the adult homeless system. Caring staff at those shelters seeing their young age will send them to us. I have heard stories of a young man who was 18 years old who was at the 30th Street shelter who was sexually assaulted in the middle of the night and left that shelter, slept in the street that night, and luckily was able to find a bed with us the next day.

I first noticed an increase in immigrant youth in the early summer before the buses. Prior to the buses, we already saw an uptick in the number of undocumented youth at Covenant House. In the past, we had a handful of undocumented youth in need of immigration legal services throughout an entire year. Since the buses began arriving, we now have 38

immigrant youth from Central and South America. We would be seeing more if we had beds. I understand the DHS' characterization that there are beds available and anyone has a bed if they want one. That is not the case. We want to be able to accept every young person that comes to our doors, but, unfortunately, the number of beds that we have is finite and sometimes we do have to turn young people away because there are simply no beds. Most of these young people are fleeing persecution, parental abandonment, and starvation. Prior to July, the number of young people who we referred elsewhere because we were at capacity on any given month was in the single digits. This month alone, there were 58 youth who we were unable to shelter, 58 youth that we had to turn away, youth that came back. Some of them were eventually able to get a bed and some were not. We have implemented Spanish-speaking mental health groups and life skills.

My role at Covenant House is to provide legal representation for these youth. I am the only lawyer in the Covenant House crisis shelter and for Covenant House youth, and I might be the only lawyer in New York City exclusively dedicated to helping

young people experiencing homelessness. That's why I'm here so the youth can get the help where they are. Until recently, most of my caseload was not immigration. It was name changes, it was for victims of trafficking and transgender clients. Those issues now have had to go to the side because I have to focus, I have to triage and make sure that my immigrant clients are served if they're in deportation proceedings...

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I know that you've submitted your full testimony, and I look forward to touching base with Covenant House. I believe we're going to be reaching out on Monday to schedule some time to learn a little bit more about what you've shared. Thank you.

DAVID MIRANDA: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

Next, we're calling Stephanie Rupp. You can go ahead when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

STEPHANIE RUPP: Good evening. Thank you to everyone for holding on throughout this very long

hearing. We are so grateful that you have been able to hang in there for the whole afternoon.

My name is Stephanie Rupp, and I'm a resident of the Morningside Heights Manhattan Valley Neighborhood. We have heard from so many wonderful organizations today, and we are very grateful for all of the work that's going on on the ground at Port Authority and in communities throughout our city. Four weeks ago, our neighborhood received over 95 families into shelter at 107th and Central Park West, three blocks from where I'm speaking now.

As community members, we provide empathetic, immediate, and informed support to our newest neighbors. We can't and shouldn't and don't try to reinvent the wheel of providing comprehensive immigration services, which we rely on from city agencies and Catholic Charities, and, as we have heard, most importantly from all of the amazing NGOs and grassroot organizations in our city. As networks of neighbors throughout our city which bring together ordinary citizens, just residents on our streets, people like me, faith communities, charity groups, community groups, food pantries, local businesses, and more, we are all rallying to support the new

families who have joined our city. We are not an NGO. We are not a charitable organization. We are just a neighborhood. We have provided essential items to the 95 families who are our new neighbors and have also been supporting families who have come to us seeking resources here in our neighborhood coming to us from shelters throughout Manhattan, the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens because these families have not been able to access crucial supplies that they have needed over the past month through city services. The neighborhood level outreach efforts have been crucial. These families have walked from other places to our neighborhood just to find a pair of shoes, some warm clothing, or a hot meal. With the incredible outpouring of logistical and volunteer support from our growing neighborhood network in Morningside Heights, we have received, organized, and distributed tens of thousands of articles of clothing and toiletries including much needed diapers, feminine hygiene supplies, asthma medication, all kinds of over-the-counter drugs for fever treatments for children who are sick, yeast infection medications for women with infections. We've supplied school supplies, toys and books, fresh fruit and hot

meals. All of these outreach activities have unfurled each and every day over the past month. We are not an NGO. We're just a neighborhood. Our neighborhood network has been actively in meeting the family's need for community, information sharing, and guidance, accompaniment to appointments and meetings throughout the city. Drawing on small donations from many individuals in our neighborhood, we have purchased phones and phone plans for every family that needed one, negotiating a fair price with a local mobile phone store.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

STEPHANIE RUPP: We have so much to do, and we need communication, and we need connection with all of these amazing organizations and with our city. thank you for holding this important meeting and for hearing our voices. We need boots on the ground, and we're grateful to everyone who's here at the end of the meeting for helping to do the right thing. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

Next, we'll call Karim Walker and Eric Lee followed Umshala Jayara (phonetic). Since I only see Eric Lee up here, you can go ahead.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

ERIC LEE: Okay. Thank you. My name is Eric Lee. I'm Director of Policy and Planning for Homeless Services United. Thank you, Chair Hanif and Members of the Committee for allowing me to testify today.

We are grateful to the Chair as well as Members of the Council for defending and reaffirming the right to shelter. Every person in New York City should be afforded this right regardless of immigration status. While we appreciate the difficult task before the Mayor, we must continue to uphold the right for every person in New York City. With regards to the Emergency Management intake process we heard today, it was troubling to hear that people would not be explained that they have the right to shelter until they first take a bus and go all the way out to the tent facility. This just highlights that the new process they're putting in place is really more for the ease of institutional processes rather than being a client-centered approach. While no one could have foretold the migrant crisis, the city's shelter capacity crisis could've been avoided altogether as contributing factors were completely within the

City's ability to address including longer lengths of stay within shelter due to bureaucratic delays in processing rental assistance and public benefits cases, lack of new shelter capacity because of NIMBYism, and delays in DHS contract registration and reimbursement processes, which have weakened non-profits abilities to respond to the City's request to stand up new shelter facility sites.

Rather than creating an outdoor tent facility within a flood zone during hurricane season, HSU recommends that the City continue to locate empty blocks of hotel rooms, stand up traditional shelters, or convert other suitable structures which can quickly be stood up to meet the immediate need. While utilizing their creativity to locate underutilized sites such as dorm rooms, vacant offices with shower facilities, and gyms which can quickly be repurposed through DHS' emergency procurement contracts.

To address the longstanding issues that have led to DHS' current shelter capacity crisis, we recommend that DHS focus on three priority areas:

Expanding eviction prevention and legal services to prevent more people from becoming homeless.

Establishing a reliable DHS shelter pipeline to create purpose-built, service-rich shelters and normalize the fiscal operations of DHS-contracted programs. There were comments earlier from I believe it was Council Member Gutierrez regarding shelter staff shortages, and we want to echo that. Shelter providers regularly experience fiscal delays. Individual providers are awaiting budget authority to use their accruals for hiring and retention bonuses given that they have high turnover and burnout right now. To Council Member De La Rosa's comments around HRA and DHS vacancies, that is absolutely leading to delays processing rental assistance and public assistance applications, and they really need to staff up in order to actually get through the workload. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL GANAPATHY: Thank you.

If anyone who has not testified at this point wishes to do so, please either consult the Sergeants or use the Zoom raise hand function.

Seeing no one, Chair, do you have any other questions?

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: No questions. I can give my closing. Well, thank you all. Everybody's gone from Chambers, but for the folks who are still tuned in and for the folks on Zoom, to everybody who stayed with us throughout the day, starting at 11 with our rally, just thank you. It is a Friday. It is nearly 7 p.m. and what was demonstrated today just shows the commitment New Yorkers have to asylum seekers and I'm particularly talking about the folks from the public who testified. You've heard me ask some heavy hitting questions to the administration around right to shelter, how exactly the HERRCs are going to be built up to mental health services to probing about legal services and the asylum process, the costs that will be needed to meet the needs of our newest students in our schools, and much more, but, of course, we didn't cover many, many topics including those pertaining to youth in particular and youth in shelter, LGBTQ in shelters, and then African migrants which we only got to touch on briefly so my hope is that we will continue to use the Council's hearing authority to be able to engage in further investigation and conversations.

I want to thank the countless organizations, the advocates, the neighbors who showed up to share the work they've been doing since before the administration got involved. Thank you for sharing the deep frustration by the mismanagement and the delays in services being procured, the lack of funding to our community-based partners and so much more. I'm committed as the Chair of Immigration to continue to have these conversations and to push the administration to do better. We have to get this right, and I deeply know that New York City can get this right. Thank you all so much.

I will gavel us out. [GAVEL]

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date October 11, 2022