



Testimony of Commissioner Manuel Castro NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

Before the New York City Council Committee on Immigration Oversight Hearing: Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants

Monday, December 19, 2022

Introduction

Good afternoon, Madam Speaker, Chair Shahana Hanif, Chair Lynn Schulman, Chair Julie Won, and members of the committees. My name is Manuel Castro, and I am the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA). I am joined by Zach Iscol, Commissioner of the NYC Office of Emergency Management, Dr. Ted Long, Senior Vice President of Ambulatory Care and Population Health and Executive Director of Test & Treat Corps, of the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and Lisa Flores, Chief City Procurement Officer and Director of the Mayor's Office of Contract Services. I am also joined by Tom Tortorici, Executive Director of Legal & Support Initiatives at the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA), who will be available for Q&A. Thank you for holding this hearing on New York City's continued response to and delivery of services for recently arrived migrants.

Immediate Response

Just four months ago, in early August, my team at the NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) began to welcome asylum seekers bused from the US-Mexico border to the Port Authority Bus Terminal in Midtown Manhattan.

We quickly learned in those early days and weeks that unlike previous waves of immigrants to our City, this population was less likely to have a family member or acquaintance with whom they could connect and reside with. This population was made up of not just single adult males but also many families with children – many who had been in the U.S. for only a few days before being bused here with little more than the clothes on their backs.

In response, the City coordinated and worked closely with state and city agencies, nonprofit organizations, and volunteers. Our mission was to meet the most immediate needs of the growing surge of arriving immigrants. We provided them with emergency medical attention and coordinated transportation, initially to DHS shelter intake sites, and now to the Humanitarian Emergency Relief and Respite Centers (HERRCs) run by NYC Health + Hospitals (H+H).

As time passed, the surge grew from a handful of buses arriving a couple of times a week in August to between 4 and 9 buses, that we were aware of, daily in September and October arriving at the Port Authority. And while the number of people coming has decreased in the last month, we have still seen a steady increases and, in a short period, New York City welcomed nearly 30,000 asylum seekers, with over 20,000 asylum seekers still in either DHS shelters or HERRCs run by H+H.

Despite the unexpected and unprecedented nature of this challenge over the past few months New York responded immediately with the humanity and respect asylum seekers deserve.

As you know, Title 42 allowed the federal government to deny entry on health grounds in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. On November 15, a federal judge declared the use of Title 42 unconstitutional but gave the Biden Administration an extension to allow the federal government time to prepare. We anticipate seeing a new wave of asylum seekers possibly arriving to New York City after December 21st as Title 42 expires.

Additional Actions Taken

In addition to our immediate response to support asylum seekers at the Port Authority, we provided wrap-around services across our shelter system. In August, NYC issued a \$6,750,000 emergency procurement for a vendor to provide case management and service operations at an Asylum Seeker Resource Navigation Center and satellite sites across the five boroughs.

Catholic Charities of New York was selected as the contractor, and we soft-launched the Navigation Center that same month. On September 15th, we fully opened the Navigation Center and started to support asylum seekers by appointment and through walk-ins.

The Navigation Center immediately began to support recently arrived asylum seekers, individuals, and families, providing them with access to everything from health care to school enrollment to immigration legal orientation and information. To date, the Center has served 7,102 individuals.

Concerning legal services, unfortunately, immigrants are not entitled to representation by a government-funded lawyer, thus making individuals and families responsible for securing and paying for their legal counsel. For this reason, over the years, the New York City government has made historic investments in providing free immigration legal services for immigrant New Yorkers. In fact, New York City spends more on providing free immigration legal services to its residents than any other municipality in the nation.

However, New York City does not have the financial or operational capacity to fund legal services for all immigrant New Yorkers that need them. The nearly 30,000 recently arrived asylum seekers join a community of over 1.2 million non-citizens who live in NYC and might also benefit from immigration legal services.

And to be clear, recently arrived asylum seekers are eligible to access our immigration legal services programs provided through contracts with legal service vendors. Services include our immigrant legal services hotline, comprehensive immigration legal screenings, brief advice and assistance, and representation on a case-by-case basis.

At the Navigation Center and elsewhere, we have also begun distributing information about the immigration legal process, providing immigration legal orientation & information workshops, and on limited occasions individual screening using redeployed contract staff and volunteers.

Going forward, the City still has \$5 million allocated to expand our immigration legal services in FY 23-24. We are now working with DSS/HRA to determine the best use of our limited resources and considering increasing

existing contracts to expand our immigration legal services.

Moving Forward

Moving forward, we recently announced, in partnership with Catholic Charities, agreements with other community-based organizations across the five boroughs to serve as satellite sites for our Navigation Center. These satellite sites will expand our reach and services to newly arrived asylum seekers in New York City, including workforce development, education, and other services for other longer-term needs.

We are also exploring ways to add to our existing legal capacity, including

1. Providing critical legal information at our Navigation Center and Satellite Sites so asylum seekers can have at the least basic but important questions answered as more vital services are introduced.
 - a. (For example, we have released information on how to change your address and check in with ICE, how to use the EOIR automated system to identify your next court date, and how to spot and protect yourself from immigration legal services fraud.)
2. Growing our immigration legal capacity field-wide and looking to work closely with contractors/vendors to ensure that the immigration legal services the City funds are accessible and prioritize those most in need.
3. Advocating for improvements in the immigration system, including universal representation in immigration court and a fair, orderly, and humane immigration system.

Conclusion

From the onset, this has been a complex and evolving humanitarian challenge that was and continues to be exacerbated by political actors such as Texas Governor Greg Abbott.

The current situation at our southern border with asylum seekers continues to be in flux. As Title 42 is expires on Wednesday, it's time for the state and federal government to step in. New York City cannot do this alone. We need the federal government to share their plans for a comprehensive resettlement program, to allow asylum seekers to work and to send aid to cities like New York City, who have borne the brunt of the crisis.

We must work together to best manage this ongoing challenge and welcome migrants to our City as we always have, while using our limited resources strategically to best serve our newest New Yorkers. We urge the City Council to join in our call for support and resources from our state and federal partners.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.



Testimony of Zach Iscol

Commissioner

New York City Department of Emergency Management

Before the New York City Council

December 19, 2022

Good morning, Speaker Adams, Deputy Speaker Ayala, and City Council. 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 has played in the surge in asylum seekers in New York City this year.

First, I want to briefly explain our role in City government and 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: ensuring that resources are available for our partner agencies to complete their core competencies and serving New Yorkers in what can be their worst days with compassion and cultural competency.

The influx of asylum seekers seeking refuge in New York City continues to be a challenging task and a great example of collaboration among city agencies. As we face this humanitarian crisis, we have not wavered in our commitment to help and support.

Emergency Management continues to coordinate between incoming buses of asylum seekers and provide logistical support to the operations of the Asylum Seeker Resource Navigation Center. The center, opened in September and operated by Catholic Charities of New York through a 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, which also has a National Guard contingent deployed for additional support. Those arriving can receive light medical care, water, and PPE. Individuals can also receive information regarding shelter in the event they do not have friends, family, or a sponsor to lean on.

Emergency Management also coordinated the opening of the Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Center (HERRC) at Randall's Island. This center, which was fully demobilized on November 16th, was the first touchpoint for arriving asylum seekers by immediately offering sleeping accommodations, food, medical care, casework services, and a range of settlement options including through connections to family and friends inside and outside of New York City, in addition to, if needed, direct referrals to alternative emergency supports or City shelters. While the location at Randall's Island is now closed, we continue to welcome asylum seekers arriving in New York City with compassion and care and using hotels to provide both sleeping accommodations and a range of services to those seeking assistance.



Over the past number of months, NYCCEM has helped support these efforts through contracts to provide wrap-around services including staffing at the HERRCs, transportation, clothing vouchers, water, and other logistic support as needed, such as reconnection specialists, bus dispatchers, interpreters, legal assistance, and security. We will continue to provide support to the operation as it moves from Randall's Island to future HERRCs. We are also working with City Hall and other agencies to ensure that the city is prepared to support any request for federal funding.

This crisis has been, from the start, a true interagency effort, and we will continue to work with our partner agencies, as well as contracted partners and providers, to provide assistance as needed. 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 it is an important investment in the future of New York.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today. I am happy to answer any questions.

**Testimony of Lisa M. Flores,
Before the New York City Council Committee of the Whole
Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants
December 19, 2022**

Hello Speaker Adams, Chair Shahana Hanif, Chair Julie Won, Chair Lynn Schulman, and members of the New York City Council. Thank you for inviting us to testify today on the critical matter of the City's response to this unprecedented asylum emergency. My name is Lisa Flores, and I serve as Director of the Mayor's Office of Contract Services (MOCS), and City Chief Procurement Officer. I am joined by my colleagues Zach Iscol, Commissioner of the NYC Office of Emergency Management, Dr. Ted Long, Senior Vice President of Ambulatory Care and Population Health at NYC Health & Hospitals, and Manuel Castro, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

The Mayor's Office of Contract Services is tasked with overseeing New York City procurement while leading reform initiatives to improve the process. This work takes on many different forms – we lead technological innovation through PASSPort to bring procurement into the digital era, offer strategic partnership to agencies navigating the procurement process, ensure regulations are being followed and taxpayers dollars are spent wisely, and support vendors, particularly M/WBEs and small nonprofits who may be newer to doing business with the City.

New York City procurement is governed by Chapter 13 of the City Charter, the Procurement Policy Board rules, and a myriad of state regulations which set forth the process and regulations for the responsible expenditure of taxpayer dollars on goods and

services needed to fulfill the duties of municipal government. This framework ultimately provides a process by which agencies may acquire goods, services, or construction of maximum quality at the lowest possible cost, depending on the circumstances and context.

The City has seen a number of emergencies in recent years which require City agencies to deliver on critical goods, services, or construction at a much faster pace than would be expected, or possible, under normal circumstances. In the case of an emergency, the legal framework offers an understanding that the ultimate priority is responding to a threat to life, safety, or property and provides tools for agencies to fast-track emergency purchases. When an emergency condition is declared, and with the prior approval of the City's Comptroller and Corporation Counsel, an agency may utilize a streamlined procurement method which maintains checks against waste, fraud, and corruption, but still allows agencies to complete procurements expeditiously. These contracts require the final approval of the City Comptroller and Corporation Counsel and are provided to the Council within 15 days after formal award, based on the requirements of the City Charter and Procurement Policy Board rules. Beyond this specialized, emergency purchase method, the full arsenal of procurement tools are available for agencies to utilize depending on the context of any specific emergency, including amending or extending existing contracts and leveraging existing services.

In the context of the asylum emergency, the City has used both traditional procurement methods and the emergency method to expeditiously acquire the needed goods, services, and construction to facilitate intake, sheltering, and service provision to asylum seekers, among other needs. In total, the City has spent approximately \$250 million this fiscal year responding to the crisis, of \$1 billion allocated for FY23 in the November plan. Our office has supported transparency efforts into these contract actions and will continue to support our colleagues in making strategic procurement decisions, ensuring procurement rules are followed, and facilitating the most effective response possible.

Thank you again for hosting this important hearing. I will be available for questions.



Testimony

of

**Ashwin Vasan M.D., PhD,
Commissioner**

New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

Before the

**New York City Council
Committee of the Whole**

on

Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants

December 19, 2022

**City Council Chambers, City Hall
New York City**

Thank you, Speaker Adams, and Chairs Schulman, Narcisse, and Lee, for the opportunity to testify today at this important hearing. I am Dr. Ashwin Vasan, the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Today I will speak to some of the Health Department's work to support our city's newest community members, people coming to our great city at a moment of extreme need and vulnerability. But before doing so, it is important to acknowledge that the health needs of people seeking asylum in New York are many. Some have immediate health care needs that are responded to at points of entry and our Navigation Center, many require connection to care to manage chronic conditions, reproductive and maternal healthcare, routine screenings, vaccinations, and mental health needs. As a city we are responding to integrate these new community members into the existing healthcare system while also providing targeted care and support in certain situations. This requires a multi-layer response.

The Health Department has been actively involved in the coordinated citywide efforts of the last few months, collaborating with, and providing public health guidance and services to our sibling city agencies, to health care and social service providers, and directly to people recently arrived from the border. In keeping with our role as the public health authority of the city, in early September we published what we call a [Dear Colleague letter](#), which is official public health guidance, distributed to tens of thousands of health care providers across the city, containing an appeal, information, and links to educational resources to provide trauma-informed, linguistically- and culturally responsive, compassionate care to people recently arrived from the border with a series of clinical, social, and contextual considerations. It is an important resource for the large network of healthcare partners who may encounter a newly arrived person from the border. I urge you to continue to help us disseminate the information contained in this letter.

Health Department staff have been intimately involved in the operations of the Asylum Seeker Resource Navigation Center. Members of our mental health Resilience and Emotional Support Teams (REST) have been onsite at the Navigation Center every day since it opened, providing psychological first aid and crisis counseling. To date, Health Department mental health professionals who specialize in emergency response have engaged more than 422 community members at the Navigation Center, providing psychological first aid to 300 community members and crisis counseling to more than 120. Our teams have also been a vital presence for other City,

nonprofit, and volunteer staff at the Navigation Center, providing psychological first aid to more than 100 colleagues as well as training to all Navigation Center staff on managing the psychological environment of the Center and engaging in self-care.

The Health Department's Office of Health Insurance Services is also onsite at the Navigation Center providing in-language health insurance enrollment services and health access information to community members. This is in addition to the services they provide by phone and at our Neighborhood Health Action Centers and other community locations around the City. This work is vital, especially when clients do not qualify for comprehensive coverage, because it helps orient people into the health system. Although we see in many cases that recently arrived New Yorkers are in fact eligible for full health insurance, at least temporarily until their immigration status is determined by a court, oftentimes it is this conversation with one of our enrollers that helps new community members identify more care and financial protection options.

We are also working to ensure that community members who use Navigation Center services are set up with a primary care home at a conveniently located community clinic as part of their visit, regardless of whether they have health insurance. While onsite services at the Navigation Center have proven vital for many, we also want to be sure that new New Yorkers have the fastest possible access to ongoing care with a pediatrician or other primary care provider to help manage their longer-term health. We are immensely grateful for the collaboration of Health + Hospitals in this endeavor as well as the many other community health centers, federally qualified health centers, and other providers who have stepped up to welcome our newest neighbors and provide them with timely and ongoing access to the health services they need.

As this situation has evolved, our staff have consistently answered the call to find additional ways to support recently arrived migrants, employing both novel and tried-and-true methods of outreach and engagement to meet people where they are, and where they live. A particularly successful approach I want to highlight today is the work that we are doing in partnership with the Department of Homeless Services – to support families with young children residing in DHS shelters. This work stems from longstanding collaborations between the Health Department and DHS to refer families living in shelter to existing Health Department programs such as the Nurse-Family Partnership for first-time pregnant people, the Newborn Home Visiting Program for birthing parents, and the Early Intervention Program for developmental work with young

children up to three years of age. We have recently extended to evening and weekend visits with recently arrived families with young children or pregnant people living in sanctuary shelters. To date, these teams have visited more than 650 newly arrived families in shelters to link them to city programs and evaluate their health-related needs such as primary care, OB/GYN care, dental care, and mental health care. As of December 15th, our teams have made more than 1712 appointments to date for these families, ensuring that they are linked to service systems that help young families thrive.

In addition to creating new pathways and models of care to meet a challenging set of circumstances, we are also leaning into our existing community-oriented infrastructure available to all New Yorkers regardless of immigration status, including the many services available at our Neighborhood Health Action Centers such as health and wellness classes, workshops, referrals to other neighborhood resources, and connections to primary, mental health, and dental care. Overtime, as our new neighbors integrate into our communities, this infrastructure will require support. New York City is lucky to have a strong network of safety-net providers, and this is a reminder of the importance of federal investment for these systems.

As part of routine surveillance, when cases of communicable diseases are reported from congregate settings, we conduct case and contact investigations and provide guidance on control measures. To prevent transmission of vaccine preventable diseases, the Health Department is supporting vaccination efforts at HERRC and DHS shelters through provision of vaccine, linkages to vaccinating providers, and staffing to do vaccine education and promotion. We are also working closely through the Office of School Health to ensure required immunizations are completed.

I'd like to close by reiterating the importance of taking a trauma-informed approach to working with new community members who have demonstrated extraordinary resilience to arrive in our city and often do so carrying traumatic pre-migration experiences, poor conditions at the border, and pre-existing social and mental health conditions. These realities inform the work we do at the Health Department every day and we are committed to continuing to find ways to support our newest neighbors. The mental health needs of these new New Yorkers will continue to be centered in our response.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I look forward to our conversation.



New York City Council Hearing

**Oversight:
Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants**

Committee of the Whole

Theodore Long, MD, MHS

Senior Vice President for Ambulatory Care and Population Health

NYC Health + Hospitals

December 19, 2022

Good morning Speaker Adams and members of the New York City Council and thank you for convening us once again to discuss the unprecedented humanitarian crisis and response facing our city. My name is Dr. Ted Long. I am Senior Vice President of Ambulatory Care and Population Health at NYC Health + Hospitals (NYC H+H), and I oversee the management and operations of the city's active Humanitarian Emergency Response Relief Centers (commonly referred to as HERRCs) alongside partner agencies such as NYC Emergency Management and NYC Department of Education, who provide critical infrastructure, contracting, and staffing support for these services. NYC H+H staff are on the ground at all times in each HERRC to supervise operations, coordinate across the multitude of dynamic services offered at each site, and onboard new services and partnerships on a rolling basis. NYC H+H is proud to be a part of the City's humanitarian response. With approximately 5,000 asylum seekers in our care, we are pleased to ensure that each person has access to the specific supports they need to complete their journey, reunite with family and friends, and immediately receive services that they have not had access to prior to their arrivals in New York City.

To give you a sense of the vastness and depth of the HERRC system I'd like to walk you through the sites currently in operation. New York City has opened a total of five HERRCs, and demobilized one; four HERRCs are currently operating. In developing the sites, we prioritized the following factors: bilingual staff, culturally appropriate food, resettlement services, and on-site medical care. On-site staff are 90% bilingual, predominantly speaking Spanish (which reflects the people we are serving). We also have staff who speak French, French Creole, Portuguese, Italian and Tigrinya. For any HERRC guest who speaks a language not spoken on-site, staff have universal access to interpretation services via Language Line, which is the same

service I use with my own patients in clinic. Menus at the HERRCs were designed to complement the diets of South America and West Africa, the regions where our residents predominantly hail from. Once we started serving a large West African population, we ensured that halal food was available at all of our sites moving forward. There are also nutritious snacks, such as apples and bananas, available around the clock, and baby formula is easily accessible at the sites that serve families with children. Every HERRC has reticketing services built into the program to encourage and assist in reunification efforts. Finally, every site is equipped with an on-site 24/7 clinical team. They are able to evaluate HERRC guests, perform certain diagnostic tests, administer vaccinations, and refer patients into NYC H+H facilities if they require long-term or emergency care.

As we have operated these sites, we have also deepened the level of support that is provided by HERRCs based on the populations each site is serving. I have had the great pleasure to take many of you on tours of the sites, but I would like to speak about each site and the tailored services they provide to meet the specific needs of the populations being served at each location.

Randall's Island served single adult men predominantly from South America and later on from West Africa. The site offered intake, legal resources, medical services, culturally appropriate food (a halal truck was made available after a large population of Senegalese men joined the site), laundry access, transportation, and resettlement and reunification services. For those that entered in the first two weeks of operation at the Randall's Island HERRC, 45% eventually left the HERRC to be reunified with families across the country or have resettled in NYC, though the numbers are lower for recent arrivals. The site was demobilized in mid-November due to the

slowdown of asylum seekers entering the city, and all men residing at the Randall's Island HERRC were offered the choice to continue their HERRC stay at the Watson Hotel, which is now operational and offers a continuum of services.

The Wolcott Hotel was opened on November 3rd for single adult women and adult families. The site offers private rooms, legal information, medical services, culturally appropriate food (hot dinners, with around the clock food also available), and resettlement and reunification services.

Finally, I'd like to discuss our HERRCs for families with children (by far our largest population) at The Row hotel and The Stewart. The HERRC at The Row hotel was the first HERRC to launch. The Row opened with a basic suite of supportive services: intake, medical services, resettlement and reunification support, hot meals with around the clock snacks, legal information, and clothing vouchers through the Salvation Army. Since launching, we have been able to develop an even more comprehensive service model through an incredible collaborative effort with our sibling agencies. There are now dedicated on-site NYC DOE enrollment staff, medical teams to provide required childhood vaccinations and physicals so that children can enter school, and MetroPlusHealth enrollment staff. In addition, we recently launched a partnership with the New York State Department of Health to provide a Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, Children (WIC) pop-up to families. The Row and the Stewart are bustling and beautiful testaments to the City's incredible work in welcoming our newest neighbors, and for those families seeking to be reunified with family members across the country, compassionately and effectively getting them where they want to go.

In conclusion, the success of the HERRC model is due to the one-stop concentration of services that each facility offers, which is tailored to the populations that they serve. We know that single adults and families have different needs and we have created sites that are responsive to those needs. We also know that many asylum seekers sent to New York City (often without knowing their destination) have relatives and friends in other parts of the country, which makes resettlement and reunification unique and critical operations of each site. We have been able to reticket and/or reunify over 800 clients since opening. With that, I am happy to answer any questions about this innovative, successful model for helping our newest neighbors.



**Department of
Social Services**

Human Resources
Administration
Department of
Homeless Services

**Testimony of Commissioner Gary P. Jenkins
New York City Department of Social Services**

**Before the New York City Council, Committee on the Whole
Oversight Hearing: Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants**

December 19, 2022

Good morning, I want to thank the City Council, Speaker Adams, and Deputy Speaker Ayala for organizing today's hearing. My name is Gary P. Jenkins, and I am the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Social Services (DSS), which is made up of the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS). I am also joined today by DHS Administrator Joslyn Carter. We are here to update the Council on the ongoing work that DSS-DHS are doing to support the asylum seekers arriving in New York City alongside our colleagues from the Department of Youth and Community Development, Deputy Commissioner Susan Haskell, and Director Tracy Thorne.

Our city is a city of immigrants, and under the Adams Administration, we've welcomed thousands of asylum seekers looking for a better life for themselves and their families. Many of them arriving from the southern border do not have family connections in the United States, meaning that the DHS shelter system has become their refuge after their difficult journey. As of today, DSS-DHS is providing shelter and services to thousands of recently arrived asylum seekers and we are proud of the tremendous work of our dedicated providers and DHS staff as they continue to step up despite unprecedented challenges. While the sheer number of asylum seekers has placed enormous stress on our system, we continue to honor the City's mandate to serve and support anyone in need of shelter, regardless of background or immigration status.

Given this opportunity to update the Council, it is important to provide context on DSS-DHS and homelessness in New York City.

The mission of DHS is to prevent homelessness, address unsheltered homelessness, provide safe temporary shelter, and connect New Yorkers experiencing homelessness to suitable housing. Our staff and providers also help individuals and families access a variety of wrap-around services to support and promote independence and stability. We carry out this mission with care and

compassion for each client and their circumstances, and these core values extend to the vulnerable families and individuals seeking asylum in our city.

Over the past few months, our teams have been working at an extraordinary pace to respond to this humanitarian emergency strategically and comprehensively. DSS-DHS staff and our provider partners deserve recognition for the tremendous work they have accomplished as we have worked to intake, assess, and place thousands of newly arrived families and individuals in shelters that meet their needs. As of yesterday, December 18, there are more than 25,400 asylum seekers who have presented themselves to our shelter intake system, which has been a driver of the approximately 43 percent increase in the DHS census since April. During the previous peak, we saw hundreds of asylum seekers applying for shelter at our shelter intake centers daily. And while the number of asylum seekers arriving in recent weeks has slowed, we've still seen steady increases. Today, we have 16,225 asylum seekers in our shelter system that deserve our care and our compassion. We continue to use every tool at our disposal to ensure that all our clients receive the highest standard of services while they are in our care.

Since we last testified before the Council on this administration's efforts to support asylum seekers arriving in our city and in need of shelter, DSS-DHS has worked to further streamline and enhance interagency efforts to support this vulnerable population. Many of these updates have been and continue to be shared on biweekly briefings with elected officials and their staff, and we look forward to continuing these discussions. Some of these efforts include:

- Significantly increasing the presence of on-site bi-lingual interpretation services at our intake centers and other sites serving asylum seekers.
- As part of a strongly coordinated interagency effort, we work very closely with our agency partners, including the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA), the Department of Education (DOE) and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) to ensure that we are addressing the unique needs of this population:
 - As part of the City's 'Project Open Arms' initiative, in partnership with DOE and MOIA, we are working to ensure that asylum-seeking families and their children in shelter have access to critical academic, social-emotional, and language-based supports needed to be successful in New York City public schools. The DOE-led effort helps connect families with the resources they need to prepare for the school year.
 - DSS-DHS works closely with our partner agencies, including MOIA, and community-based providers to connect clients to dedicated immigration supports and referrals.
 - Medical and behavioral health supports:
 - DSS-DHS is also working with DOHMH to ensure that staff at shelter facilities serving asylum seekers have a resource list of federally qualified

health centers (FQHCs) which serve anyone in need of medical health services regardless of immigration status.

- DSS-DHS is also working closely with NYC Health and Hospitals (H+H) to connect families that do not qualify for Medicaid to NYC Care -- H+H's health coverage for families/individuals who may not otherwise be eligible for health insurance.
- DOHMH and providers of family support services contracted with ACS are working directly with Sanctuary sites to assess behavioral health needs and make referrals to the appropriate services. Shelter sites ensure that asylum seekers have transportation (as needed) to locations for their appointments. Additionally, shelter staff regularly meet with asylum seekers to discuss additional behavioral support that they might need.
- We've connected asylum seekers with IDNYC: we've offered appointments at the Navigation Center as well at other locations as capacity allowed and had special weekend hours at select sites specifically for the asylum seekers. IDNYC and DHS are working together to identify and hold pop-ups at sanctuary sites for single adults and families. Moreover, IDNYC has expanded its list of acceptable documents to include documents asylum seekers could have received from border patrol when entering the United States.
- Community collaboration is vital to our efforts to welcome asylum seekers: the City and the provider partners we work with are committed to ongoing, open engagement and working with all community stakeholders to ensure our sites are integrated into the community and our clients receive a warm welcome.
- The families and individuals seeking asylum are coming to us after a harrowing journey, and we are committed to making sure that we are providing access to services and supports that prioritize health and well-being.

While challenges have arisen, our shelter system is withstanding the many stresses placed upon it, as we serve thousands of individuals and families in need. Our work goes on as we continue to support the needs of this vulnerable community.

We are leaving no stone unturned to support the unprecedented number of asylum seekers within our system. The November Financial Plan included \$577.3 million for DSS/DHS shelter services and \$22.7 million in DSS/HRA for additional assistance including interpretation costs, welcome centers, and legal services for the asylum seekers.

Before I close my testimony today, I want to echo something that Mayor Adams and I have stressed: "housing vulnerable New Yorkers requires a citywide effort." We are all in this together, and we need your help to find the necessary capacity to house our neighbors. We appreciate the support that we've received from the Council and New Yorkers as we've creatively expanded our shelter capacity across the five boroughs.

In closing, the DSS-DHS shelter system continues to meet the needs of this moment even as this unprecedented surge has stretched its resources. DSS-DHS is the safety net of the safety net, and we are proud of the work that our staff and providers have done to stabilize and safely shelter the thousands of individuals seeking a new home.

We thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and we welcome any questions that you may have.



TESTIMONY

Before the Council of the City of New York

Committee of the Whole

Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants

Susan Haskell, Deputy Commissioner for Youth Services

December 19, 2022

Good afternoon, Speaker Adams, and members of the Committee of the Whole. I am Susan Haskell, Deputy Commissioner for Youth Services at the Department of Youth and Community Development. I am joined by Tracy Thorne, Director of Operations for Runaway and Homeless Youth Services.

On behalf of Commissioner Keith Howard, thank you for the opportunity to discuss how DYCD and our funded programs, in particular our Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Services programs are supporting asylum seekers from the Southern Border. This fall, DYCD staff joined our colleagues to welcome migrants at Port Authority to better understand and meet their needs. Commissioner Howard visited sites most impacted to discuss their experiences, we learned from the legal expertise on the ground supporting youth and young adults seeking asylum, and we continue to assess the impact on program capacity.

DYCD facilitates monthly convenings with RHY providers of Crisis Services and Transitional Independent Living Support Programs, as well as Street Outreach and Drop-In Centers. To date, the impact on RHY providers has been concentrated in Manhattan. However, RHY residential programs and Drop-in Centers across the City are also serving asylum seekers, though at a smaller scale.

RHY providers have demonstrated incredible flexibility and compassion for the unique needs of arriving young people, including working to navigate the legal requirements to apply for asylum. DYCD is working in partnership with other City Agencies, including MOIA, DSS, DHS, ACS, and DOE, to ensure that youth who need support are able to access service.

For example, DYCD partnered with DHS to ensure access for our providers to make appointments for youth at the City's Asylum Seeker Resources Navigation Center, which offers eligible migrants access to health and mental health care, school enrollment, immigration legal services and IDNYC enrollment.

Beginning prior to the pandemic and the migrant situation this year, our team remains in regular communication with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, to ensure that all youth and young adults in runaway and homeless youth programs are provided with the most recent information about legal services, and other resources.

If there are any language barriers between staff and youth who are seeking asylum, DYCD's Language Line services can be accessed by contacting CommunityConnect at 1-800-246-4646. DYCD is exploring additional tools for providers to help meet their translation needs.

DYCD remains committed to identifying new opportunities to help meet this need. Last week, we heard suggestions from the Coalition for Homeless Youth and the Youth Action Board, including for example ideas for training and professional development. We will continue to communicate new resources as they become available.

Thank you once again. We are pleased to answer any questions you may have.

**Testimony of NYC Public Schools
On Examining the City's Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants
to the NYC Committee of the Whole**

December 19, 2022

Good afternoon, Speaker Adams, Deputy Speaker Ayala, Chair Joseph, and the members of the City Council here today. My name is Melissa Ramos, and I am Senior Executive Director of Program Implementation for NYC Public Schools. I am joined by my colleagues Flavia Puello Perdomo, Chief of Schools for Community Support and Wellness, Mirza Sanchez-Medina, Chief of the Division of Multilingual Learners, Sarah Kleinhandler, Chief of Student Enrollment, and other wonderful colleagues from the Department of Education (DOE). Thank you for the opportunity to discuss NYC Public Schools' efforts to effectively welcome and support our migrant and asylum-seeking students. Your leadership and collaboration with this administration has been absolutely critical in this challenging undertaking, and all of us at the DOE are grateful to you.

New York will always be a city of immigrants, and our schools continue to welcome any child from any background who needs a safe and supportive place to receive an excellent education. Every student has the right to a high-quality public education, regardless of immigration status. The Department of Education has been working with our sister agencies on Project Open Arms to support families seeking refuge. At every level, from schools to shelters to DOE's central offices, we are working to ensure a smooth transition for all students without any disruptions to their education. Today's circumstances remain fluid with emerging needs identified each week. But as always, we have risen together to meet this challenge.

Background

Since May, New York City has experienced a surge in individuals arriving from border states who have been seeking asylum. Many have entered the city's shelter system, while others have found housing through family members, friends, or sponsors. The city estimates that over 31,800 asylum-seekers have arrived in NYC since then. While the DOE does not track the immigration status of students, the surge has resulted in a significant increase of students living in temporary housing. Most of these children are in the elementary school age range, but there are also many teens over 16 who arrived without any school records. Approximately 40 percent of children in this influx are aged zero to 5.

From the very beginning, NYC Public Schools not only helped to launch Project Open Arms, but Chancellor David Banks crucially appointed myself as a point person to lead the coordination of internal efforts in the Department of Education. This work requires both intra- and inter-departmental coordination. In addition to the helpful weekly calls convened by City Hall to keep stakeholders informed, the DOE held its own briefing for elected officials and staff that more than 100 people attended. Thank you to Chair Hanif and Chair Joseph for contributing greatly to that briefing. We also thank the Council for being such valuable partners in this effort.

On-Site Support

From the moment these families arrived in our city, NYC Public Schools has helped to facilitate student enrollment and support families' immediate needs. To start, we set up an enrollment office at the Asylum-Seeker Navigation Center. Enrollment counselors at the site have been helping families connect to schools while providing backpacks, books, and school supplies.

Many of these families are residing at shelters across the city where the DOE has staff on-site to assist them. Our students in temporary housing (STH) staff, including our STH Regional Manager, Family Assistants, and some school-based STH Community Coordinators, are working at shelters to support families with such issues as enrollment, transportation, wellness, and more. The STH team receives daily updates of new shelter locations from DHS, and we ensure that STH Regional Managers are fully informed of new sites so that they can activate their district teams and get personnel out to meet with families. The support this team provides includes daily check-ins with families to share enrollment options, conduct needs assessments, and do wellness checks. The team also partners with schools to complete necessary paperwork for enrollment and testing as well as walking families to nearby schools to enroll their students and orient them to their new neighborhoods.

Our staff, whether at the Navigation Center or on-site at shelters, is working to identify schools with available seats that are closest to the shelters, prioritizing multilingual learners. We are committed to finding schools that offer support to multilingual learners that do not pose a travel hardship for the students. To date since July, we have enrolled over 9,800 students in temporary housing at schools across the city.

Throughout this challenging set of circumstances, all the materials we provide to families continue to be translated into the appropriate languages, and we have strived to enable families to select the best language program for their children.

Support at Schools

Once students are enrolled, we work closely with superintendents and principals to conduct initial assessments to determine what comprehensive and targeted resources are needed, especially for special education and bilingual programs. An example of this support was when elected officials escalated concerns about PS 16, a District 11 Bronx school that received an influx of students and needed additional resources, such as another classroom teacher, support with a transportation issue, and other resources. Almost immediately, the school received their mid-year fair student funding to hire an additional teacher, a bus stop was added to make traveling easier for students, and families benefited from the Shared Table, an initiative that safely repurposes non-perishable food and fruit.

We have also provided more financial resources to schools so they can fully support these students, including more than \$60 million for our newly arrived New Yorkers. That amount is divided between over \$50 million in additional Fair Student Funding that has gone to support students in temporary housing who have entered our schools during this time, plus \$12 million from new emerging needs. This supplemental funding allows schools to provide additional curricular and instructional services for multilingual learners, as well as family support and essential school purchases. Schools with six or more

new students in temporary housing received an allocation of \$2,000 for each student enrolled since July. Those allocations enable schools to support the following priorities:

- **Ensuring Language Access and Support** – In collaboration with superintendents, the Department of Education is ensuring that all families are supported in their native languages and that school leadership is aware of the constellation of resources available to provide translated content-specific information.
- **Providing Academic and Extracurricular Programming** – New York City public school curricular and instructional resources are culturally and linguistically responsive, and we provide educators with additional guidance related to second language acquisition and specialized instruction for diverse learners. Extracurricular activities are also targeted to students' needs and interests, with the goal of enhancing their academic and social experience.
- **Creating Supportive Classrooms and Schools** – We are working with schools to make sure students receive universal social-emotional supports that help them build positive relationships, develop social and emotional skills, and connect to additional support when necessary. This includes programs like Advisory, Health Education, Restorative Practices, and others that are designed to support the needs of the whole child. Additionally, many schools implement a strengths-based social-emotional screener that is used to assess and support students' social-emotional skills and development while connecting them to interventions. School leadership and staff have regular check-ins to review attendance and social-emotional data and ensure that interventions and supports are activated as needed.
- **Coordinating Continuously with Community Providers and Community-Based Organizations (CBO)** – 'Project Open Arms' is working in tight coordination with critical CBO partners and other organizations to provide families with critical resources and services.

Mental Health Services

Thanks to the Council and city administration, every school has money for a social worker, and in some cases a school-based mental health clinic that provides mental health services. In addition to the approximately 5,000 social workers and guidance counselors who work in our school system, nearly 400 DOE schools have School-Based Mental Health Clinics, more than 170 schools have on-site clinical services with contracted providers, and over 330 schools have Mental Health resources at School-Based Health Centers. Our central team is continuing to work with superintendents and principals to deploy additional resources and support as needed. While these investments pre-date Project Open Arms, they are proving to be more critical with each passing day.

Interagency Coordination

Since the arrival of new asylum-seeking families in May, we have worked closely with our partner agencies, including the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA), the Department of Social Services (DSS), and others involved in Project Open Arms to support these families and students as they navigate their new city. For example, DOE's Office of Student Enrollment, Pupil Transportation, and the STH team presented "back to school" webinars for DHS and HRA family shelter provider partners in August, which our agency partners and advocacy collaborator Homeless Services United provided outreach for. These webinars included information focused on Multi-Language Learners and enrollment support for

migrant families. Our STH team is working closely with DHS Partnerships Team to coordinate and highlight donation needs to be sure those contributions are spread out across shelters. They have also worked closely with ACS's Preventive Services office to identify preventive service agencies in impacted districts with capacity and the ability to manage language needs. Those teams also connected with The Food Bank for NYC to receive a list of food pantries in impacted districts.

Conclusion

Since May, Project Open Arms has performed a comprehensive, interagency effort to support families seeking asylum and ensure that children are provided with a full range of services to start their New York City public education. I want to again thank the Council for providing essential support toward this ambitious undertaking. Your leadership in this crisis has demonstrated how the home of the Statue of Liberty continues to stand as a beacon for those who want to find refuge and thrive in the United States of America.

Many of us sitting before you share similarities with our newest New Yorkers. For instance, Chief Flavia Puello Perdomo was an international student herself who graduated from NYC Public Schools. Chief Mirza Sanchez-Medina was a bilingual teacher recruited from Puerto Rico who also led an international school. And I was a student in the Bronx who benefitted from wrap-around community services because my mother had only a 9th grade education and no means to support us on her own. We deeply empathize with our students in multiple ways, and are deeply committed to applying the fullest extent of our power and capabilities to support them,

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak with you today, and we look forward to answering any questions that you have.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 12/19/22

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gary Jenkins, DSS Commissioner

Address: 4 WTC

I represent: Department of Social Service

Address: 4 WTC

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gillian Smith, Executive Dir. OSYD

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Flavia Puella - Perdomo

Address: _____

I represent: NYC DOE

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jodi Sammons Chen Chief of Staff
Address: School Operations

I represent: DOE, Operations

Address: _____

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ROSE NEELDOWNEY DEPUTY DIRECTOR
Address: OF OFFICE OF LANGUAGE

I represent: ACCESS

Address: _____

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Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mirza Sanchez Medina
Address: Chief of Multilingual Learners

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Melissa Ramos

Address: _____

I represent: NYC DOE

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sarah Kleinbrunner - Chief Enrollment Officer

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tracey Thorne Director RNY

Address: 2 Lafayette

I represent: DYC

Address: _____

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(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Syson Haskell, Deputy Comm

Address: 2 Lafayette

I represent: DYCD

Address: _____

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Date: 12/19/22

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Soslyn Carter, Administrator, D

Address: 33 Beaver Street

I represent: Department of Social Services

Address: 4 WTC

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dr. Ashwin Vasan, DOHMH Commissioner

Address: _____

I represent: DOHMH

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Date: 12/19/22

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lisa Flores, MOCS

Address: 255 Greenwich Street NYC

I represent: Mayor's Office Contracts

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rishi Sood, Exec Director of Health Care

Address: Access and Policy, DOHMH

I represent: DOHMH (Q&A only)

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Theodore Long

Address: 50 Water St

I represent: H+H

Address: 50 Water St

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Commissioner Manuel Castro

Address: 253 Broadway

I represent: Mayor's Office of Immigrant Aff.

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tom Tortorici, Exec Dir. ^{Legal} Initiative

Address: 252 Broadway

I represent: Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Commissioner Jack Fowl

Address: 100 Cadman Plaza East

I represent: NYC Emergency Management

Address: _____