

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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March 7, 2023

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HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

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Chairperson

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Russian-speaking Community Council

Monique Pena
RiseBoro

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Make the Road New York

Alex Stein

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Good afternoon and welcome to the Preliminary Budget of Immigration. At this time, if you can please place phones on vibrate or silent mode. Thank you. Chair, we are ready to begin.

[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Good afternoon. I'm Council Member Shahana Hanif, and I have the privilege of serving as the Chair of the Committee on Immigration. I want to start off by saying that we have simultaneous interpretation for the entirety of today's hearing available in Spanish. New York City is home to more than three million immigrants, over 600,000 of whom are undocumented. Since April 2022, the City has welcomed close to 50,000 asylum-seekers. Of the total of this number, approximately 30,000 newly-arrived immigrants remain in the care of our city. To meet the needs of these newest New Yorkers, the Administration has opened 92 emergency shelter sites and seven Humanitarian Emergency Relief and Response Centers, HERRCS, six operating out of hotels and one operating out of the Brooklyn cruise terminal. The City has also opened a Navigation Center and 10 satellite sites across the five

boroughs to enroll asylum-seekers in programs and benefits they're eligible for. Additionally, the Department of Education has expanded seats for 13,000 new migrant students to-date. Given the expanding scope of immigrant services, resources must be prioritized accordingly in this upcoming Fiscal Year. It is disappointing that the proposed Preliminary Budget leaves significant gaps in the City's ability to meet the needs of our immigrant community. At today's hearing, the Committee will examine the proposed Preliminary Budget and identify program areas that must be strengthened in the upcoming Executive Budget. With the Council projecting more tax revenue exceeding OMB projections by 5.2 billion dollars and much-needed support for asylum-seekers finally coming shortly from the state and federal government, we have the resources needed to support immigrant New Yorkers. This committee rejects the austerity framework that pits new arrivals against long-time residents. We call on the Administration to restore and increase funding to services that allow our newest New Yorkers to thrive. The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs Fiscal 2024 Preliminary Budget totals 745,000 dollars and supports six full-

time positions. MOIA coordinates and collaborates with various city agencies including the Department of Youth and Community Development Services, the Human Resources Administration, the Department of Education, and NYC Health + Hospitals on managing MOIA programs that are found within these agencies. While recognizing the dynamic intergovernmental role that MOIA plays, the Committee is skeptical that the Office can effectively carry out its duties with only six fulltime staff members. We look forward to seeing how the Council can ensure the Office is sufficiently resourced. This year, again, the proposed Preliminary Budget reduces funding for adult literacy programs by 50 percent. This is unacceptable. Adult literacy programs are essential to navigate housing, healthcare, education, access to better jobs, and participate in the City's economy. The Fiscal 2024 includes-- the budget includes an additional 9.4 million dollars when compared to the Fiscal 2023 Adoption Budget in ActionNYC to cover immigration legal services. However, given the increased community need, we are concerned this funding will not be able to adequately support a scaled up pro-se legal training program that is

needed to help people successfully complete asylum applications and become eligible for work authorization. We want to ensure that MOIA is taking full responsibility for managing the Navigation Center and satellite sites and providing assistance and resources to the community-based organizations that are currently providing services to asylum-seekers. I'm looking forward to hearing from MOIA on their strategy and budget plan and to hear how they engage with agencies and community-based organizations to best serve immigrants. We're also eager to hear about new initiatives rolled out by the Mayor this morning, including the Office of Asylum-Seeker Operations. After we hear from MOIA, the Committee will hear testimony from the New York City Comptroller, and then we will hear from the public. And again, simultaneous interpretation in Spanish will be available for that portion as well. Lastly, I would like to thank the Speaker for her commitment to supporting the immigrant community. I also want to make sure that we thank our committee staff for their hard work, Principle Financial Analyst, Florentine Cabore [sp?]; Unit Head, Aliya Ali; Committee Counsel, Jayasri Ganapathy; Policy

Analyst, Rebecca Barilla [sp?]; and my staff
Legislative and Budget Director, Alex Liao;
Legislative Intern, Amy Whitcomb [sp?];
Communications Director, Michael Whitesides [sp?];
and Chief of Staff, Nora Brickner. Now, I would like
to welcome the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of
Immigrant Affairs, Emanuel Castro, to speak, and I
would also like to recognize my colleagues who have
joined me today, and we have Council Member Gale
Brewer. Anyone on the Zoom? And Council Member
Sandra Ung on Zoom. Commissioner Castro. Actually,
Rebecca.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Before administering
the oath, the translator would like to provide a
quick statement.

TRANSLATOR: [speaking Spanish] Thank you
very much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will now hear
testimony from the Administration. Before we begin,
I will administer the affirmation. Panelists, please
raise your right hand. Do you affirm to tell the
truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth
before this committee and to respond honestly to

Council Member questions? Thank you. You may begin when ready.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you, Chair Hanif and the Committee on Immigration for holding this budget hearing, and thank you so much for providing simultaneous interpretation. That's great. We should be doing this at every hearing. My name is Emanuel Castro and I am the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. I am joined by Jasniya Sanchez, Deputy Chief of Staff, and Tom Tortorici, Executive Director of Legal and Support Initiatives who will be joining me for Q&A. And I do have to say that both Jasniya and Tom are some of the hardest working people I know. They are often the first to come to the office and the last to leave. So thank you for both of you for joining me today. But before I start my testimony, I want to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to the entire team at the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. I know that they are watching and listening attentively, so I want to give them a special shout-out. From the moment I stepped into my role as Commissioner, my staff has gone above and beyond most just to support me, but truly to support the

immigrant community. Their commitment goes beyond the normal day of work and goes beyond their job description. I'm sure HR does not want to hear that, but they often do. Whether it's a fire or a construction death, a global pandemic, international humanitarian crisis, the team has taken action-- has taken action and has been at the front lines to assure our immigrant neighbors have the City by their side. And each time the work that they do has strengthening our role as a city of immigrants and a city that is welcoming to all. So I want to thank you all for listening. I really appreciate your work and your effort, and I look forward to continuing to work together. So turning back to the hearing, I want to first recap MOIA's mission as a way to anchor this conversation. The Charter recognizes MOIA's unique role and expertise as the Mayoral office that focuses and understands immigrant-related issues and requires MOIA to advise and assist the Mayor and other city agencies and offices on developing and implementing policies related to immigrants and limited English-proficient New Yorkers, track state and federal law and policy, increase access to City programs, benefits and services through outreach and

connections to the community, and help advise on legal services' needs of immigrants. MOIA's also required to consult with the community and other stakeholders and coordinate an interagency taskforce on immigrant affairs. In addition, MOIA works with relevant city agencies to address the needs of immigrant crime victims and witnesses. MOIA is also required to report annually on its programming and the demographics needs of immigrant New Yorkers. That report will be published I believe next week on March 15th, and I encourage everyone listening to take a look at that report. In my testimony today, I will talk about some of the information that will be included in that report and our work at our office. I am proud to testify that we go beyond the Charter mandate requirements of MOIA. We continue to work on the front lines to address the emerging needs of the immigrant community. Although we work closely with various city agencies and offices, it is important to emphasize that we do not oversee or manage their initiatives and budgets, even if they impact immigrant New Yorkers. For example, we work closely with the Department of Social Services to include the documentation that asylum-seekers were given by

Customs and Border Protection as proof for eligibility to access IDNYC, but we do not oversee the IDNYC program budget itself. We also work with Health + Hospitals to eliminate the six-month residency requirement for NYC Cares, but we do not oversee NYC Cares budget. Finally, the Charter explicitly notes that immigrant New Yorkers make up a large percentage of the City's population. According to the 2020 census, there are over three million foreign-born New Yorkers. That's almost 40 percent of all New York City residents. However, that may be an undercount considering some immigrants, particularly those who are undocumented often live and work in the shadows. It is imperative, therefore, that the City Council and Mayoral offices like us work together to bridge the gap between immigrant communities in our city government. This testimony will briefly outline some of the challenges that immigrant New Yorkers face and present some of the work in the past fiscal year and that we will continue to be engaged in in the following. First, legal services: New York City has invested more than \$60 million in immigration legal services, recognizing that immigrant legal services are a tool

of empowerment for immigrant New Yorkers and their families. Legal services can help immigrant New Yorkers stabilize their immigration status and access jobs, health insurance, education, and ultimately benefit from New York City as a whole and fully.

MOIA's legal services programs exist in partnership with legal service providers, community-based organizations, and other city agencies. That includes ActionNYC, NY Citizenship, the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, and new programming that addresses emergent needs such as the Haitian Response Initiative and the Ukrainian Response Initiative. In total, MOIA oversees more than \$10 million in funding for legal services programming, and ActionNYC makes up its lion share of the funding with over \$8.5 million allocated to that program. In total, ActionNYC providers conducted over 11,000 comprehensive immigration legal screenings this year, an increase of about 25 percent compared to last year, 2021. Action NYC also opened nearly 6,000 new cases, a decrease of two percent compared to 2020. Of cases in which immigration authorities rendered decisions in 2022, 96 percent were approved. Action NYC initiatives referred over 3,000 cases to other

1 legal services providers in 2022, and of these, 1,779
2 were referred to ActionNYC and CBOs. And I can read
3 on more and more, but this will prolong my testimony.
4 But that's all to say that ActionNYC does a
5 tremendous amount work as is, and it works in
6 collaboration with many of the other legal services
7 programs available to immigrants. Demand for
8 ActionNYC services continue to grow in 2022 with over
9 40,000 total calls received by the city-funded
10 ActionNYC hotline. This represents a 27 percent
11 increase in call volume over 2021 in a 259 percent
12 increase since the year the hotline was established.
13 In 2022, the ActionNYC hotline set new records for
14 the highest number of calls fielded in a single
15 month, in a single year. This significant growth in
16 call volume can be attributed to both growing
17 awareness, services among long immigrant residents in
18 New York, but also and most likely the influx of
19 newly-arrived asylum-seekers calling into the
20 hotline. DSS, HRA, and MOIA are also working to
21 identify ways to meet the immigration legal needs of
22 newly-arrived asylum-seekers with \$5 million that is
23 earmarked for Fiscal Year 23 and Fiscal Year 24.
24 MOIA is currently finalizing the design of a
25

coordinated citywide initiative to provide orientation sessions and most critically, pro-se application assistant clinics citywide in partnership with nonprofits, pro-bono lawyers, law students, and community volunteers. Services will be provided at scale and will serve thousands of people at the Navigation Center, the HERRCs, the DHS shelters, DOE schools, and other community sites. We will keep you updated as we finalize details in the coming weeks.

Now moving on to language access: The Administration is committed to language access, and I said it from the moment I first testified here, it is one of my most significant commitments and long-term commitments in my work as an advocate prior to my appointment. This is a large task, however. About 22 percent of all New Yorkers are considered limited English proficient. In addition, over 200 languages are spoken in the City. Some researchers put this number, however, at close to 900 when you include dialects in languages of low limited diffusion. This linguistic landscape presents complex challenges to city government. MOIA plays several roles in advancing language access. First, MOIA conducts multi-lingual outreach and provides multi-lingual

information to immigrant New Yorkers. This includes providing interpretation and translation services specific to mayoral offices. During 2022 overall demand declined for both translations, a 63 percent decrease from 2021, and interpretation services, an eight percent decrease, mirroring the decline of COVID emergency-related requests that MOIA had been uniquely positioned to support and as a result of our mayoral transition. Conversely, demand for telephonic interpretation increased significantly, a 73 percent increase, driven by MOIA's legal initiatives program and the breadth of languages increased across each of the services delivered. In 2022, MOIA fielded requests for translations into 57 languages and served more than 30 mayoral offices and agencies. Second, MOIA helps to strengthen the City's capacity to communicate effectively with New Yorkers with limited English proficiency by advising and providing technical assistance to over 30 agencies and 20 mayoral offices, as well as external entities. This includes advising on language services procurement, providing guidance on creating multi-lingual websites and other tools, sharing practices on multi-lingual outreach and engagement, and

advising agencies on and conducting oversight of implementation of Local Law 30. Third, MOIA serves as an experimental lab to pilot language access best practices and educate partners on those practices. For example, MOIA piloted contracting with a technology vendor to human translate our website into 10 Local Law 30 languages instead of relying on standard machine translation. MOIA shared its work on creating multi-lingual websites with other agencies, and as a result some of these agencies have pursued similar strategies and we've become a model to follow nationwide. Other programming within the office also touches on the needs of New Yorkers with limited English proficiency. MOIA continues to develop and administer We Speak NYC, the City's free English language learning program which was baselined at \$1,198,000 in FY22. As New York City continues to support immigrant communities in response to COVID-19, We Speak New York programming transitioned in the last year from in-person courses to delivering-- from in-person courses to deliver English conversation classes online, promoting access and safe language learning practices, and this last year we've transitioned to a hybrid model. Moving on to

1 outreach: Our outreach team plays a critical role in
2 increasing access to city services and programs for
3 immigrant New Yorkers. I am personally committed to
4 building bridges between immigrant communities and
5 city government. Early in 22 I set a goal of
6 visiting and connecting with over 200 community
7 groups. I am proud to say that we exceeded this goal
8 and connected with over 316 diverse community groups
9 across the five boroughs. And these engagements go
10 beyond just visiting a site or visiting with a group,
11 but the intention is to have actual dialogue and
12 conversation to understand the needs and challenges
13 of each particular community. In addition, MOIA also
14 works to empower the community to exercise their
15 rights and access to services. MOIA conducts Know
16 Your Rights presentations across immigrant
17 communities and partners covering different topics,
18 and utilizing different models to deliver crucial
19 information. We couldn't do this without of course
20 the support and partnership of our community-based
21 organizations, many represented here today. The
22 community service team also connects immigrant New
23 Yorkers to help connect with the supports that they
24 need, offering real-time support systems, whether
25

it's in-person, public-facing events, convenings with key stakeholders, and critically our Ask MOIA hotline. Finally, addressing the issues that immigrant New Yorkers face requires engagement at all levels of government. In 2022, MOIA worked to coordinate local and state and national advocacy on behalf of immigrant New Yorkers, including by partnering with local elected leaders across the nation to push for federal change and by submitting comments, supporting legislation, and connecting with state and federal partners on a variety of topics. Much of this is done through coalition of municipal--city and municipal leaders, Cities for Action. The coalition has issued multiple statements and sign-on letters calling for comprehensive resettlement plan to support asylum-seekers, calling on comprehensive immigration reform that addresses TPS holders and DACA recipients, and expedited work permits for asylum-seekers and much more. I know my testimony is long, but I just want to give you as much information as possible. Now moving on to addressing emerging needs. Time and time again, MOIA has taken action when immigrant communities face emergencies. From the moment we heard that asylum-seekers were arriving

on buses sent here by Governor Abbott of Texas, MOIA took action to directly understand and support those asylum-seekers arriving. MOIA worked with the Port Authority and community groups to ensure we welcomed the newly-arrived immigrants, but also assist to make sure that they are connected with the critical care they needed. As of this month they are over or close to 50,000 asylum-seekers living in New York City; 30,000 still under our care, a historically rapid influx of new residents into the City. This is not the total of asylum-seekers in our city, however. Many have arrived here and connected directly with their friends, families and existing networks. MOIA has worked with our partner agencies and offices to provide shelter, food, healthcare, education, and immigration legal support. The City allocated funding to support asylum-seekers such as the \$6,750,000 in case management work that became the Navigation Center and its satellite sites across the five boroughs, and again, has provided and allocated five million dollars to increase our legal services and meet those needs. MOIA also worked to secure \$1.5 million in FY22 funding for community-based partner organizations that can provide linguistically

and culturally responsive case management services to Haitian New Yorkers. These new arrival Haitian New Yorkers come into New York City due to recent natural disasters, political upheaval, and changes in federal policy. This funding supports case managers who work with newly-arrived immigrants and determined eligibility for benefits and connect them to other resources. Finally, in response to global events such as the Afghanistanian [sic] evacuation and the Ukrainian invasion, MOIA has also taken a lead in assessing and proposing needs for these communities and supports for these communities. We created, for instance, website with resources for impacted communities and those seeking help, and MOIA continues to monitor the situation in Ukraine and work to respond to these many crises. And I have more to say, but I will skip for now, only to say that MOIA continues to work on the ground to support immigrant communities impacted by these ongoing crises. And just to conclude, again, I would like to thank the MOIA staff, all city agency staff and partners for all their work, and I want to thank the Chair and the Committee for all that you do in support of immigrant communities, for your advocacy

and to the Speaker for her work in uplifting immigrant communities as well. I look forward to the Committee's questions and working with the Council on the budget-- as the budget process continues. Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much, Commissioner. We really appreciate your thorough detailed testimony, and it's always an honor to just hear the breadth of work that you all are doing, and of course, deeply appreciated your gratitude to the MOIA team. We see your work. We appreciate everyone who is a part of the team, so thank you so much to your contributions. It's really wonderful to hear again the innovative work that you all are doing to expand language access, and I love that you see it as a lab. You see MOIA as a lab, and I think that's absolutely how it should be seen and done, and to expand on language access policy. So I'm really grateful to hear-- this might have been the first-- one of the first hearings where you've really described MOIA as a incubation hub for language access policy. So, excited about that. Before I go into my set of questions, I wanted to ask about two things from what I've heard in your testimony. I'm

1 concerned that the translation services at MOIA has
2 decreased by 63 percent, and we've seen important
3 documents related to asylum-seekers not translated,
4 for example, the Navigation Center outreach
5 information and then information about shelter
6 placements or transfers. Why hasn't pandemic health-
7 related translation work shifted to these needs, and
8 maybe you might need to share if there are agency--
9 if you're not tasked with it or another agency is,
10 but would love to just understand more about the
11 decrease and how you've shifted.

13 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you, Chair,
14 for your question, and it's something that we've been
15 looking at as we prepared to issue our report for our
16 work in 2022. It's information we're also analyzing.
17 And in part, you know, what I mentioned in the
18 testimony is a decrease in certain requests that MOIA
19 had received. Quite often during the pandemic or
20 during the height of the pandemic, those types of
21 requests decreased in the last year, but other types
22 of requests increased. So we'll make sense of that
23 information and included in the report, but it's
24 certainly something that stood out and I wanted to
25 include in my report. Again, I wanted to provide as

1 much information as possible about our work,
2 including, I think, details that sort of highlight
3 the changing nature of what we do. Now, in respect
4 with translation services or materials that are being
5 distributed at the Navigation Center and at the
6 HERRCs, well, the HERRCs are managed by H+H so they
7 have their own language services contracts, so they
8 tap into those, and it's managed by health agency
9 that uses the same contracts to also support their
10 work at the HERRCs. At the Navigation Center it's
11 work that we are doing with Catholic Charities
12 collaboratively. Again, things, you know, move quite
13 fast in the last eight, nine months. So where we saw
14 gaps, we have been able to step in and translate
15 materials that were not available and will continue
16 to do that. Much of our role is identifying those
17 gaps, especially when those are brought to our
18 attention by Council Members and by other members of
19 the community, and that role we take very seriously.
20

21 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you for that.

22 Will you share what are the typical requests for
23 translation and what you were seeing in 2021, and
24 then what you're seeing requests for in this year?
25

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes. So, you know, I was not here in 2021. My understanding is that most of the requests came from other community-based organization partners or other agencies as they needed to translate materials quite fast as the pandemic-- you know, there were a variety of needs as the pandemic evolved, right? And so there were a lot of materials that were put out. MOIA was best-positioned to translate some of these materials. Now, MOIA is specifically tasked to translate materials for mayoral offices, not city agencies. That's a significant difference. Each agency has their own mechanism and contracts, and we do work with all offices and agencies on their language access plans, so we do understand how is it that they engage with language service providers. However, MOIA specifically is getting requests from mayoral offices. So, you know, it could be the Mayor's Office of Community Affairs Unit, or you know, Mayor's Office of International Affairs, and so these are the requests that we field and we use our language access services provider's contractors to manage that, that we can't do in-house. So this year, again, you know, we had a new crisis on our

1 hand with asylum-seekers. There was a lot of
2 unknowns, right? And now we know it's primarily
3 Latin-Americans, but not only Latin-American Spanish
4 speakers, but also asylum-seekers from other
5 countries. So, you know, we respond based on the
6 changing needs of the situation. Again, you know,
7 we're also transitioning out of COVID, so there are
8 less requests that were specific to COVID and
9 guidelines that needed to follow.
10

11 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So, just to be clear
12 here, the requests are coming community-based
13 organizations, like the partners who might testify
14 this afternoon, and mayoral offices.

15 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yeah, I think I
16 would say that our specific role is to translate
17 materials for mayoral offices, but if a community
18 partner that reaches out to us, you know, that is
19 contracted with us, we work with them, you know?

20 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay.

21 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We-- we're not
22 mandated to translate materials for them, but of
23 course, you know, I want to make sure that we're as
24 supportive as possible.
25

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And what's the funding allocated to provide these translations? And is there an interpretation component as well, or specifically translation of documents?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: It's translation and interpretation. Jas, can you provide some details? And again, you know, just to reiterate we're specifically mandated to provide these services for mayoral offices, and not for CBOs or other outside entities, but again, I want to make sure that we are working closely in supporting, you know, wherever is possible, because I know that's critical. And I'm sure we'll get into this when we discuss language access.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. And I'm just realizing that because we're having a great conversation about language access, I'll just begin with language access and then go into priorities for the year. I want to acknowledge that we've been joined by Council Member Moya on Zoom, Council Member De La Rosa here.

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: Thank you, Chair. So, as the Commissioner mentioned based-- the contracts that we do have under MOIA are both for

document translation and in-person interpretation.

So we have those available in terms of budgeting and funding for those services and other needs for the language access team. For this Fiscal Year, 1.3 million dollars was allocated specifically for those needs, and we do have contracts in place for that.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: 1.3? Could you repeat that one?

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay. I'd like to also acknowledge that we've been joined by Council Member Joseph. And then from your testimony, I'd like to learn a little bit more about the Ask MOIA hotline number. What is the number? How does one learn about this number? And how much funding is allocated for these-- the hotline services? Who operates the hotline?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, well, we did get the number, and I say it so often, I can't believe I don't-- I can't remember. But for the record, it's-- the MOIA hotline is 212-788-7654. And frankly, we developed this Ask MOIA hotline-- first, our role is to assist and advise city agencies and offices on issues relating to immigrant or

immigrations-- immigrant communities and immigration.

We often step in and develop initiatives to close a gap or address an unmet need, and we thought it was important, you know, in my time really critical to support the work that, you know, 311 does, right, in helping immigrants navigate, you know, the various immigrant-- or various city services for immigrant communities. So it really is-- meant to enhance the ability of our city to do so. Now, we're not as resourced, and they get only a couple of staff that are fielding calls. When people find challenging, you know, find challenges in using 311 or other means to connect to the appropriate city service agencies or information. So we're available. We're getting a lot of calls, especially from asylum-seekers who are trying to still understand how city services work. We provide this hotline for people to call us if they run into any issue, and then staff connects them to the appropriate agency. And we also have it available in all 200 languages. We have contract with a provider that allows us to be able to communicate in any of those languages that people might need translation services for.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: How much funding is allocated for the operation of this?

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: I mean, that is like the Commissioner mentioned we do have only-- have couple of staff assigned to this, so just we don't have specific budget allocated to this, but they do use part of the language access budget for the telephonic interpretation.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So, are the staffers how are supporting taking calls, are they-- are there designated roles to be a part of the work for the hotline, or are they also a language access specialist or part of the MOIA team. Could you break that down for me a little?

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: They're part of our community services team, so they are focused on fielding those requests that come in and be able to connect constituents to the adequate services, but we do have a team dedicated to that.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And is it a 24-hour hotline or is it a 9:00 to 5:00?

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: It's a 9:00 to 5:00. It's not a 24-hour. So, you know, during the day the staff do answers the calls live, and then you

1 know, those phone calls that are received after
2 hours, people leave voicemails and the staff do go
3 through all of them and get back to folks that way.

4 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Yeah, this seems like
5 a really innovative approach to really allow
6 communities to be in direct contact with MOIA, and I
7 really support this. I'm just a little startled to
8 learn that there's no specific budget to like keep it
9 going in the way you've been running it or to expand
10 it to reach maybe more or to extend hours. Do you--
11 are you fighting for a budget this, the hotline
12 service?
13

14 DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: I'll pass it on--

15 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: [interposing] Is that
16 a priority?

17 DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: to the
18 Commissioner, but I just want to also add that we
19 also have emails of, you know-- constituents can also
20 contact us via email so that any type of inquiry that
21 gets to us, our team, you know, will support them as
22 well.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Yeah, that's really
24 great.
25

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, you know, I said I-- staff time and resources from what our outreach team, external affairs team to do this work. I do think that it's innovative. It's meant to complement, right, 311 and other hotlines, but I do think that there's a lot of value in people being able to have a fallback plan if we can't reach a service through 311 or other means, they can have the MOIA hotline as a back-up and that's helped tremendously. And so, you know, there was an instance of someone stuck at the airport, wanted to go back to their country, and they call hotline, and then we activated our team to try and help, right? You know, those are the kinds of stories we hear all the time, you know, that people have that number ready just in case something happens.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And is expanding a budget or having an allocated budget for the hotline important?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, you know, it's-- comes out of our general funding. I do think it's a great model, and you know, we're in ongoing conversations with OMB and with our colleagues about our needs. I do think that it's helped tremendously.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. What's the status update of MOIA's Language Access Specialist, and how many specialists are currently on the team addressing the need for translation and interpretation?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, while Jas pulls up the numbers, and because we-- I've spoken about this in prior hearings. You know, early on last year this was a priority of mine to try and add support to the Language Access Specialist. It's always been a very-- our access line was team-- it's always very small, and a lot of people are surprised that it is and has been. In one of the first initiatives that I proposed back to the Mayor, he agreed that this was priority for us to strengthen and grow the team. Now, that said, it is a highly specialized team, because you do need staff that are not only skilled in language services technology and procedures, but for me, it has been important to hire individuals that are from the community or connected to the language communities that we're going to serve to understand the nuance from within those languages. I think that's when we run into trouble when, you know, we don't fully understand that, you know, how these

1 communities are communicating amongst each other and
2 with government. And so we're working to hire people
3 as best we can that are the strongest possible to lay
4 a foundation to really build this infrastructure up,
5 much like what the cooperative project and the
6 Language Access Bank is doing, it's going to take a
7 lot of time and energy, but I think it's worthwhile
8 having the right team in place, but I'll hand it over
9 to Jas to talk about details.

11 DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: So, currently, you
12 know, we are continuing to work very closely with our
13 teams to interview and also with OMB and other agency
14 partners to be able to onboard candidates. We have
15 identified a handful of candidates that are currently
16 going through the hiring process. Like, the
17 Commissioner mentioned, we-- this is a very technical
18 position, right? So it has taken a little while to
19 actually find the right fit, but I don't have the
20 specific in terms of like how many specifically for
21 the language specialists, but in general like we have
22 11 candidates for MOIA that have been identified not
23 only for those specific positions but other positions
24 within MOIA as well that are currently making their
25 way in the hiring process.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So, just to be clear here, have any been hired yet?

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: Not to-date.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Go it.

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: But they're in the process.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So they're in the pro-- some process.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We do have offers in some-- we have made offers and we have some really strong candidates. I'm saying this because I don't want to scare anyone who might be listening. We want to make sure that of course they have to engage through the process of being hired and on-boarded, but I think you know, we've been interviewing a lot of people, vetting folks. You know, actually for these specific roles, they have to have an assessment, you know?

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: How long is the interview process, because for several hearings now we have raised the issue of-- or at least to learn the progress of hiring Language Access Specialists, and I know that you're trying to fill 10 or 12 in total. So, would love to learn just are the

challenges related to the lengthy interview process or the bureaucratic red tape that it takes for a city worker to become a city worker.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We think as everyone knows, it takes a while to become a city worker. You know,, that's just sort of the nat-- the normal, you know, sort of process that we all have to engage in, but then there's also the added layer of having to go through a number of different rounds. There's an assessment tool that we use for the language access specialists, and also frankly, the candidate pool we've-- we have a plan to recruit and encourage people to apply, and you know, I think this was mentioned yesterday and other times, I think we're competing, right, with a lot of different other roles that people have available to them, and we're encouraging anyone that might be interested in joining our team and engaging in this work to come forward and apply. And we have some very strong candidates, and I'm excited about being able to on-board those candidates. And I think, like I said, for us it's been important that we are hiring from within these language communities and that we are still committed to, even if it takes a little longer.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: We're seeing that the website says that there are eight paid language specialists, is that true, or is that--

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: Was there eight what?

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Eight paid Language Specialists or candidates that are--

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: Well, there's-- yeah, we're still in the process of hiring for other languages. It's been in terms of like the candidate pool has been a bit short in some of these languages. So we have also worked very closely with our folks with-- from ethnic media, CBOs, reaching out directly to those folks, also. We have posted a lot of these-- all of these positions in language services, you know, job boards as well to be able to grow that, that pool. So I mean, and this is just like specifically for this positions. It's very technical. There's a very technical aspect to it, so it has been very challenging to get the right pool of folks, but we do have a set of folks that have been identified in certain languages. I don't have the specifics, unfortunately, but we could get back to you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: We'll definitely follow up, yeah.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Just to answer your question, is that-- that's what's posted. That's [inaudible]. We're hoping to add more to that, but yes, that's what's available.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great. And I'm just putting a lot of emphasis on this, because it's so important that we really equip MOIA to have the language diversity and the talent. I really support this modality of language access, like really pulling talent from our communities, and creating this hub to strengthen our language capacity with real people who recognize the colloquial nuances, the regional dialects, and so this is one piece of MOIA that I really am keeping my eyes peeled on and support. I am just a little disappointed with the challenges, and I'm curious how else has the outreach taken place? What is the outreach funding allocated to really create this robust team of experts? Because we will be leaning on MOIA once this capacity is reached. Is there separate funding to be able to do this outreach to bring in candidates?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We don't have recruitment funding for hiring, but you know, as Jasniya mentioned, we tapped into our ethnic media, community media partners to promote these positions. And I think-- again, you know, there's a variety of different challenges, you know. There's-- we are-- we're not working remotely or we're not in a hybrid model, and so people are still hesitant, you know, to come back. That's what I've heard from candidates. But I think things are changing a bit, especially as people feel inspired and motivated by the work that's happening in support of asylum-seekers. And so I'm encouraged by the candidates that we have in place that we will hopefully on-board and I think in the coming months and year, we're going to be looking at our-- the different languages that-- based on data, of course, on census data and other data of the evolving needs of our language access in the city, which is increasingly-- well, it's interesting. There are a lot of languages that are I think growing in their use, and so we want to bring on partners or even staff to meet those needs.

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: And if I can just add, you know, while we don't have like a specific

1 budget for recruitment, like we do use funding from
2 our general budget, right, to think about innovative
3 ways to, you know, do outreach for folks. Like I
4 said before, we actually partnered up with our folks
5 at ethnic media to do a roundtable to talk about also
6 like dispositions. We've connected also with all of
7 the CBOs that the Commissioner has visited with as
8 well as also working very closely with our human
9 resources offices with partner agencies to be able to
10 help [inaudible] these positions in other platforms
11 as well so that we can cast a wider net as well to be
12 able to recruit, you know, the pool of candidates.
13 Like that it's currently in the works, and you know,
14 we definitely encourage folks, you know, to apply to
15 those other postings, you know, to be able to grow
16 that pool and find the right candidates as well.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Absolutely. I'd like
19 to acknowledge that we've been joined by Council
20 Member Chi Ossé. So, I wanted to respond. I mean,
21 we really need to-- you know, the Administration
22 hasn't been supportive of remote work and language
23 access is one of those arenas where we can actually
24 have a thriving remote work workforce, and many
25 translation providers who exist within our

1 communities opt for or have been opting to do
2 translation work because of the remote options, and
3 so that is something I deeply believe that the
4 Administration has to change how it is seeing remote
5 workers, because remote work continues to be good
6 work, and for the translation part of the work that
7 we're set out to do to create a city that is language
8 just, we have to consider that translation providers
9 can do work remotely. And so that's one of the
10 things I would urge, and of course, would love to see
11 a video maybe from Commissioner Castro like show--
12 like telling New Yorkers to do this work. We have
13 this opportunity and a-- to your point, incubate what
14 language justice looks like and lean on our
15 communities. So I would be happy to do a video maybe
16 with you to--

18 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: [interposing]

19 [inaudible]

20 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: bring in some
21 candidates. And I've shared, and I was really proud
22 to see some excitement with the positions and really
23 because so many of our immigrant community members,
24 and I don't have to tell you or your team, are
25 looking for work, and one of the places, easiest

places that they can come into, is translation interpretation, and to have that support, the curriculum or the technical skill-building opportunity, this is really one of the arenas where we really need to build out robust strategy. So, that's why I'm concerned that there's no specific money for outreach, because strategy is needed to really build out this team. I just recently visited Hillcrest High School in Jamaica where they have a dual program in Bangla and I was there were a group of seniors received a feel of bi-literacy. So not only are they achieving fluency in English, reading, writing and speaking, but also in Bangla, reading, writing, and speaking. And for me that signal's incredible that our high schools, our public schools here have these programs that will 100 percent funnel in a pipeline for our next generation of language access providers.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: And if I can add, I think one of the things we've been exploring in the last year is how to partner with schools, you know, whether it be trade schools or even CUNY to encourage them create certificate opportunities on, you know, for translators as a career. I think growing that

pool is important, especially in city like New York. But those kinds of employment opportunities I think they're global, right, because you can do remote. And so I think we'll continue to think about that, and we have discussions. We've participated-- MOIA has participated in a number of job fairs with DCAS, and you know, that is exciting work because we do want to encourage more members of our community to apply to roles within city government. And yes, I completely agree. I mean, I think-- well, you know, we'll make that video for Tiktok or elsewhere.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. And I'll two more questions around language access and then pass it to some colleagues. What's the baseline funding for We Speak NYC in this Fiscal Year? And the out-years.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, while Jas looks for the number, we-- you know, we, as I mentioned in my testimony, we moved from an online model because of the pandemic to hybrid, that's really exciting. In my previous role I engaged with English language classes and it's such a great way to build community amongst immigrant, especially newly-arrived immigrants. We just delivered several boxes of We

1 Speak materials to our Brooklyn cruise terminal. So
2 we intend to provide that service or that program,
3 make available to asylum-seekers. But it's exciting
4 to be able to bring those kinds of resources to
5 newly-arrived immigrants. And hopefully, once we can
6 do more in-person, help build community which I think
7 is essential.

8
9 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's really great.
10 So, this program is offered over Zoom, or?

11 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Currently hybrid
12 and we're rolling out a number of different in-person
13 classes, you know, just testing the water. It's been
14 a while and I do think that it's a great way to both
15 practice English but also communicate important
16 resources available to immigrants, because the
17 classes use these highly-produced videos that, you
18 know, of immigrant communities engaging with city
19 government or learning about their rights and so on,
20 and so we want to bring those to asylum-seekers, but
21 really any other newly-arrived immigrant. You know,
22 We Speak is meant to-- like a lot of our other work
23 enhanced the existing work of, you know, the adult
24 literacy program at DYCD for instance. So ill hand
25

it over to Jas who has some details about the numbers.

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: Yes. I-- so for We Speak NYC, for the programming piece, it's budgeted at \$873,000 dollars. For next-- it has been baselined through FY22, I believe.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: \$873,000.

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And it's baselined.

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: right, and that's just for the programming piece. In terms of the team itself, we do have currently five folks that are part of five staff lines that are dedicated to this program specifically, and very excited to say that actually we're-- they're part of like the 11 people that we selected. Three lines were recently also baselined for FY23, and we have selected candidates that are making the way [inaudible] to be added to MOIA team hopefully very soon.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great. And happy to learn that it's hybrid, because I know with some other adult literacy programming there's been a push to go completely in-person and that has been a challenge for our communities. So I'm grateful to

1
2 know that the We Speak program is hybrid and hope
3 that it continues, that you all expand on the ways in
4 which you can bring in communities to the program,
5 and I think the in-person is great and should exist
6 for those who can make it in-person and then the
7 opportunity to have these options online is
8 absolutely critical.

9 DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: Correct, and if I
10 can sort of piggyback on what you were saying.
11 Actually, that was one of the lessons learned from
12 the team, you know, like through pandemic, like you
13 know, having to shift everything online, of course.
14 Like, you know, we wanted to make sure that we were
15 still able to deliver this vital service to the
16 community, right? And now as things are back in-
17 person and all of that, one of the feedbacks from the
18 community itself was we like online, right? So the
19 team has been great [sic] [inaudible] you know, sort
20 of, you know, listening to really what the needs are
21 from the community and what works best. So having
22 that flexibility, it has been great and, you know,
23 everyone is very excited about having to do all of
24 in-person and online.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great, thank you. I mean, and right before this we were talking about remote options for a city worker. So hopefully we see this program as very similar to the way in which we need flexibility across the board, not just for communities, but also city workers who make up our communities, and finally-- oh, did you want to add another--

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: Very quick. Well, the City is looking into remote work, so it's, you know, it's being assessed. So, you know--

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: [interposing] Good to know. Good to know here. Could you provide a program update for the language worker cooperative for languages of limited diffusion and the community interpreter bank?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, while Jas works on that, I-- you know, I think with-- we met with the organizations that were funded to do the-- to do this work in the summer last year, and made ourselves available to support along the way, but I think in general we agreed that projects like these take a lot of work, you know, and effort and even the things may be slow and there might be challenges, I do want to

1 provide a whole lot of grace to the nonprofits taxed
2 to do this, because I know firsthand how difficult
3 these could be standing-- not just standing them up,
4 being you know, mindful of the challenges on the
5 ground with communities, but also working with
6 government contracts, you know? Of course, you have
7 to get reimbursed and somehow figure out how to pay
8 for the work first. And so I know that they're
9 working really hard particularly to set up worker
10 cooperatives. It's a model that is-- you know,
11 that's collaborative, you know, the nature of the co-
12 ops, you know, you have to really give it time and
13 nurture them quite a bit.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So is there someone
16 on your team who is like the kind of chief person
17 bringing the nonprofits together, the providers
18 together, or is there someone designated among the
19 group of providers who is tasked with figuring out
20 the timeline and how to go about doing this?

21 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I think for now--
22 and I'll hand it over to Jas, but for now the
23 coalition that brought this work to City Council and
24 to us has been leaning, you know, and figuring out
25 how they'll work together and individually as they

1
2 set things up. But our language access team will
3 play a really critical role, because the idea is that
4 there is cohesion amongst all these different
5 efforts, right? You know, with the cooperative, the
6 bank, the language access bank, and our role as
7 overseeing language access in the City.

8 DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: Thank you,
9 Commissioner. Thank you, Chair. So, this effort
10 specifically is actually led by DYCD. So, MOIA plays
11 more of an advisory role, and we do work very closely
12 with DYCD and not only on this particular initiative
13 but in various other projects as well. So it's an
14 open communication our language access team will
15 still, you know-- it's well aware of all of this, and
16 you know, we do have that open communication with
17 them so anything that happens and, you know, where we
18 can provide support and advice. We are happy to
19 [inaudible] in terms of details, we'd have to defer
20 to DYCD.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So, with the close
22 coordination of DYCD, do you have a timeline as to
23 when we might see the launch of a worker cooperative?
24
25

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: Not at this point we don't have like, options [sic] of the timeline, but we can circle back with DYCD--

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: [interposing] My understanding is that [inaudible] communities together who has an operational cooperative, and the other groups are working to establish them. I think their goal-- I mean, and we'll support them with this-- is to get to a place where they could access, you know, perhaps bids, right, from city government and elsewhere, and engage in that work. That's their ultimate goal in setting up these cooperatives. And DYCD oversees this in particular because they're the ones that will receive discretionary funds, you know, and they also lead on adult literacy and so on, but you know, we're committed to working with DYCD, you know, in establishing these partnerships.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: does that mean that the several millions that we fought for will need to be fought for again to ensure continuity of the work that these groups have started to then really come out at the end with an actual worker cooperative?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I think with discretionary funds, yes. It's year after year that

these funds need to be renewed, and you know, I hope that these groups continue to get the support they need because it does take-- it's a multi-year approach, especially with cooperatives. I-- you know, I worked in that space and so I know that it just takes a lot of work on behalf of those nonprofits that are incubating these cooperatives, especially if the intention is to create multi-lingual nonprofits. With communities, for instance with indigenous communities that are looking to sort of support themselves, right, through a cooperative.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much. I will pass it to Council Member Carmen De La Rosa for her questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Thank you, Chair, and thank you Commissioner and team for being here. I have to do a double-take. I was like, this is the operating budget for MOIA? You all are doing God's work on literally a penny. So, the efforts are noted and appreciated. I wanted to ask about immigrant legal services, and I know that you know, this is a topic of conversation and has been for many, many budget negotiations not only here in the City but on the state level, and I know that in FY23

1
2 MOIA received five million dollars for immigrant
3 legal services. I know that the demand for legal
4 services as you all know is increasing. A lot of our
5 asylum-seekers neighbors need, you know, serious
6 access to these services in order to regulate, right,
7 their applications and their status here. And so I
8 wanted to see if there's an update on the five
9 million dollar allocation and RFP, and is there sort
10 of a plan or an agreement with legal providers to
11 roll out the funding as of yet?

12 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, this question,
13 I'll pass it over to Tom to respond, but first I'd
14 like to say that, you know, this has been top of mind
15 for me from day one. I had worked with asylum-
16 seekers in my prior roles and I know how challenging
17 these cases could be. They're often multi-year, and
18 of course, there's always risk of those claims being
19 unsuccessful and people being asked to be removed.
20 They're really complex and really difficult cases to
21 take on, so I wanted to recognize that and
22 acknowledge that legal service providers who have
23 been doing this work, and I think that-- I mean, we
24 both share our insight and to know how is it that
25 we're going to be able to serve so many people with

these tremendous needs? And it's been an ongoing crisis. Early on, my mind was, well, we need to get funding out as soon as possible, and so we issued an emergency procurement, but as the nature of the situation continued to evolve, I mean I thought we would welcome a couple of thousand people, but never - I never imagined we would get to 50,000 in such a short period and possibly more. So I think we've been having ongoing conversations, and Tom can share more about that, but I think many of us are in agreement that in order to scale and help as many people as possible, we need to move towards a pro-se clinic model and leverage, you know, pro-bono and volunteer support and just help as many people as possible get some support, because this will be a long-term situation for many of them and we want to be there at least at the outset to make sure that they have access to work permits and other means to sustain themselves in the meantime. But I'll hand it over to Tom to describe all the work he's been doing. He works like all day and night to figure this out, and so thank you, Tom, for all the work you've put into this.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Thanks, Commissioner, and thank you Council Member De La Rosa. The emergency procurement for legal services with under five million dollars for Fiscal Year 22, 23 and 24 launched in mid-September of last year. We received no competitive or not insufficient competitive proposals and so the procurement is no longer active. Since that time we've been in communication with existing contractors, contractors that provide immigration legal services under different city contracts regarding the possibility of expanding those contracts to incorporate the five million. We should have something to announce soon, but we're in the final stages of those conversations.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: And do you know-- well, I guess you have to wait for the contract to be awarded, but do you have any idea of like the criteria for selecting organizations to carry out the work or can you dig in a little bit on how it works, who'll be selected to do the work?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: You're right that we can't describe the process at this time or the organizations with whom we're speaking, but I can say that as Commissioner Castro mentioned, the

scale of the need requires a creative novel response such as pro-se clinics, information orientation sessions, ensuring that folks have updates regarding, for example, their one-year filing deadline for asylum and other important dates. And so we're working to develop and design and co-design a creative response in that way.

COUNCIL MEMBER DE LA ROSA: Do you know why there wasn't any competitive bids that were put in? Was it like lack of sort of advertising the RFP? Like, what do you think is leading to the non-competitive bids?

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Tom, will you bring the mic closer?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Oh, sure. Thank you. So we had an information session for vendors in which they could ask questions and express concerns about the emergency procurement. Some of the things that were mentioned during that session where insufficient quantity of funds given the scale of the need, timeframe to apply for the emergency procurement, and also lack of full consideration for full representation in cases, given the last three years or more for asylum. And so, you know, we took

that back and we considered all of that feedback, but ultimately there were no competitive proposals received. Thank you

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: And I just want to add that we've learned quite a bit from that process, and you know, I think early on in this challenge, I think we-- you know, we wanted to get funds out as soon as possible, but we also completely understand that like the hesitation by the providers to take on that big responsibility when there were so many unknowns. So now we're working with a lot of same providers we have always worked with through ActionNYC and the folks that we always work with to provide assistance to, you know, newly-arrived immigrants, and I think with a little bit more time to sit with this and knowing what we know now, I think it's a good time to be able to roll out this new phase and come together in support of asylum-seekers living here.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Council Member Brewer?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you. I want to echo the Chair's accolades towards you and your division. So, definitely agree with that. So, in

1 terms of the ID New York City, IDNYC, I had two
2 really good discussions this morning. One with
3 attorneys from the Upper West Side who are working
4 with the many families and the schools, and then
5 thanks to Tiffany Rasbury [sp?] talking about the
6 Mayor's blueprint for the future, which I don't quite
7 understand, but we'll talk about that in a minute.
8 But in terms of IDNYC, I think it's a real--
9 understood that if there was the ability for every
10 single person who is here as an asylum-seeker to get
11 one, it would be very positive. God knows there's so
12 many other problems. But even within that world, I
13 guess there's a budget, and one of the questions
14 that's being asked is if folks check the website to
15 see if New Yorkers can make appointments for the
16 first time as an applicant-- and apparently it's not
17 allowing first time applicants to do that. But the
18 other problem I have is that some of the types of ID
19 are challenging for this particular ID. So, I think
20 the Venezuelan's apparently is hard to use, because
21 their national IDs are laminated, things like that. I
22 know that both the Chair and I have ID suggestions
23 for legislation that would hopefully change some of
24 this. Everything's in the future. I'm trying to
25

1 deal with the current situation. And so you got
2 passport problems. You've got expired passport
3 problems. I got a whole list here from the lawyers
4 this morning-- the ICE order problems, the Parks
5 Department problems, domestic partnership problems,
6 etcetera. So I want to know how are you making sure
7 as much as you can now to get people these IDs in
8 terms of outreach, and how many renewals or how many
9 firsts have been made to date to the asylum-seekers.

11 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well first, thank
12 you, Council Member, for all your support and for
13 your advocacy throughout this time. I just want to
14 make sure that you know that I'm always-- I--

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] You
16 pop up everywhere.

17 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I always think
18 about you when advocating for work permits, you know?

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes.

20 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Because you were
21 one of the first people to say they need work
22 permits.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know. I know
24 what they need now, so I haven't brought it up, 180
25

1 days, 150 days, they need a lawyer, I got the whole
2 thing down, but now I'm focused on the ID.

3
4 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, yes. You
5 know, and the IDNYC is quite an important program for
6 immigrant New Yorkers. One thing that's quite
7 different from I think the previous Administration
8 now is that IDNYC is fully administered by DSS, not--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]
10 Correct.

11 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: MOIA, so--

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] Yep.

13 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: you know, we don't
14 have all the information.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah, but you're
16 stuck with the problems.

17 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yeah, you know, but
18 thank you for raising those concerns. Our role is to
19 also take that information and raise those concerns
20 with DSS and figure out how do we support them to
21 address them, and I think, you know, we'll have to
22 look into the website situation, because that-- we'll
23 have to look into that.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.
25

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We, you know, we had-- we were able to have IDNYC and continue to have IDNYC at our Navigation Center--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing]
Right.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: located at the Red Cross where people can actually enroll in IDNYC. If you're an asylum-seeker and you're staying at one of the HERRCs in Midtown or any of the shelters around the City, you can visit our Navigation Center without an appointment.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Right.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: You don't have to go online and make an appointment, and there you can connect with IDNYC and enroll in the program--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: using those documents that they were provided at the border. And yes, with Venezuelans it's been a challenge because the US does not have diplomatic ties with Venezuela, so they don't have the counselor representation here needed to address those issues. If it were another country I would be able to call the Counsel General

and say, okay, you know, we have a person with this problem. That's not the case with Venezuela.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I guess we have to pass the legislation.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, we--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: [interposing] We have to get rid of the lamination. I know that sounds silly.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And I know time is tight.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, I just want to say we got to work harder on the ID--

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: [interposing] Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: is what I'm trying to say. People need it.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Agree.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, and then second thing, just to go back to the legal issues. The Mayor announced something today. I must have [inaudible] Mayor's Office, there must be a new taskforce for everything, right? I don't really understand. This one should have been you. I don't

1 know if we need new one. I got it. I listened very
2 carefully to Tiffany Rasbury this morning. However,
3 does it mean when you have this new asylum-seeker
4 operations office of-- whatever the hell that is--
5 that you're going to have more money for legal
6 services, because the mayor said they're going to
7 call this pro-bono and that pro-bono and so on. Is
8 it more money for legal services? I'm as concerned
9 as you and Carmen De La Rosa.

11 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, my
12 understanding is we'll continue to move forward on
13 the initiative we just discussed, the five million
14 dollars.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That's not much
16 money.

17 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I'm unsure if there
18 will be more, but we'll continue to discuss it with
19 OMB, and you know, I said this before, there-- I
20 mean, if you calculate how much it would need to
21 support all 5,000 people who have arrived with legal
22 services is a tremendous amount, so we do need the
23 support of the federal and state governments to do
24 this, but I think my office will continue to have a
25 big role in all this. You know, the office will be

1
2 established, and it is meant to, you know, support
3 all of the many different agencies working on this
4 and centralize things, but you know, because we are
5 responsible for many of the legal services and
6 convening them. I think we'll continue to have that
7 role.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you, Madam
9 Chair.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. I'd like
11 to invite our Comptroller Brad Lander to testify.
12 You can come sit up in the front, and we'll have our
13 MOIA friends here, too. We have some more questions.
14 Sure, okay. So, on the conversation about the IDNYC,
15 Council Member Brewer hinted at this, that we have
16 some piece of legislation that would enhance, make
17 IDNYC more accessible, and we've got my legislation
18 Intro 909 in relation enhancing the application
19 process. It would require DSS in coordination with
20 you all to implement various changes to improve the
21 IDNYC application process, including developing a
22 biannual training program for IDNYC workers on the
23 application process, providing adequate in-person
24 application appointments to match the demand for
25 IDNYC, permitting same day and walk-in appointments

1 at IDNYC service enrollment centers, and providing an
2 appeal system for applicants who have been denied on
3 IDNYC ID card. And then, Council Member Brewer's
4 legislation, Intro 790 in relation to documentation
5 establishing proof of identify for a New York City
6 identity card would add documentation to the list of
7 acceptable documents for proof of identity needed to
8 apply for an IDNYC card including documents issued by
9 Federal Immigration authorities, a street vendor's
10 license, a record of arrests and prosecution, a
11 prison ID and an identification letter from a legal
12 services or social services organization. Are you
13 able to respond to anticipation of any fiscal impact
14 because of these two pieces of legislation at this
15 time?
16

17 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, only to say
18 that, you know, the-- I think-- our goal is to have
19 as many people as possible access the IDNYC. I mean,
20 that's the commitment and I think we want to make
21 sure that as many people as possible are able to
22 attain it. I mean, you know, again, the earlier--
23 early in the-- when asylum-seekers were arriving, we
24 assisted DSS in understanding the kind of
25 documentation that asylum-seekers were being provided

at the border, and many of them had lost their documentation on their way here.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Right.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, we were able to advise and make sure that our sister agencies understood the nature of the situation, and we'll continue to do that, and I think that's the most important role we can play, you know, providing context to the situation of the different migrants and asylum-seekers and refugees that arrive in our city because they're all different, and it's-- you know, while the IDNYC is administered by DSS, and we don't have a really specific role with a budget, you know, we'll continue to uplift IDNYC and really as a source of pride that a person who might be undocumented is able to get a document, an official document by New York City and recognize them as New Yorkers in such a way is so important.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So, despite not having a role with the budget, do you have a position on these two pieces of legislation?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, I have to take a look at it, but you know, again, the more people are able to access IDNYC the better. I know

1 that there are reasons as to why there's a limit with
2 respect to the documents that are accepted to be able
3 to enroll in IDNYC, but I think the more people that
4 have access to it, the better within those limits. I
5 look forward to making sure that that happens.

6
7 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. We look
8 forward to working with you. I'd like to pass the
9 mic to Council Member Joseph.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you. Thank
11 you, Commissioner. How are you? Good. We know the
12 numbers are much higher. You and I since 2021 have
13 been welcoming asylum-seekers to New York City to the
14 point where I was on the borders of Texas and we were
15 talking back and forth. And what does resettlement
16 look like? I know you've been having this
17 conversation. Can you tell us what resettlement look
18 like for our asylum-seekers?

19 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Council Member,
20 resettlement within New York City or outside?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: With the feds--
22 with the federal government. They must come in and
23 help.

24 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yeah, this is
25 something that we've been calling on for a while.

You know, I said this over and over. I mean, I think all of us who have worked in this space have understood that the immigration system is deeply broken. And you know, I think this just highlights how broken it is. You know, that they-- you know, that they expect asylum-seekers to somehow be able to provide for themselves without being able to work legally and not put in jeopardy their asylum claims. So we've called on the Federal Government to figure this out and do more, but also to come up with a federal plan to distribute asylum-seekers throughout the country. Because early on, especially asylum-seekers were just going wherever they were put on buses to go, and the only free bus out of Texas was to New York or D.C., and you know, they were being taken advantage. Now people-- there's websites encouraging people to go to New York. I mean, there's all kinds of things happening. So that's why the Federal Government needs to step in and actually have a plan. Yeah, you know, with respect to New York City I think we make it available to all asylum-seekers, the ability to have a ticket to go reconnect with their families if they wish to elsewhere in the country, and that's available to them. We don't

1
2 encourage them to leave or go elsewhere, but we do
3 have that available to them and that's important
4 because family reunification is important, being able
5 to connect to a community network of support is
6 important, and so we recognize that, and you know,
7 we're there to support.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you. Do
9 you have a number of-- do we have any unaccompanied
10 minors that was part of the asylum-seekers? And if
11 we do, how many, and were they placed in foster care?

12 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, with
13 unaccompanied minors who are apprehended at the
14 border, there's specialized programs.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Correct.

16 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: And that-- the
17 Federal Government does step in and, you know, they
18 do have a resettlement and a program specific to
19 unaccompanied minors, but what we do know is that
20 young people, right, under a certain age do arrive,
21 and you know, and they need to be enrolled in schools
22 and they need a whole lot of support. And so we're
23 working to figure that out, especially with the
24 reports of underage workers, you know, and their
25

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you. We know that 2.2 million adult New Yorkers is in need of basic education, English language, with only four percent of these adults currently being served, which is over 44,000 largely non-English speaking asylum-seekers and refugees. We noticed that the Administration cut over 10 million dollars of this adult literacy funding in Fiscal 2024. Has MOIA met with the literacy-- Adult Literacy Coalition to discuss the impact of reducing funding on adult literacy?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, we haven't met with them recently. Didn't meet with the Coalition last year. As the Executive Director of NYSA [sic], I was part of the coalition, and so the work that they do is tremendously important and I did meet with the DYCD Commissioner, expressed our interest to support NYSIS [sic] wherever possible. We Speak New York is there to enhance-- really, to enhance their work. ID-- We Speak is really more advanced than-- and we have limits as to introductory classes-- with introductory classes. The adult

1 literacy program administered at DYCD does that,
2 right, and it goes toward supporting newly-arrived
3 immigrants. But yeah, I'll have to defer to DYCD.
4 You know, they have the complete picture with funding
5 that's available for that.
6

7 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Just a follow-up.
8 Have you considered maybe partnering up with District
9 79 that provides that type of adult literacy and also
10 provides CTE training to make sure that our asylum-
11 seekers have a pathway to working?

12 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: You know, that's
13 something that I've been thinking quite a lot, what
14 more we can do with Department of Education. That's
15 certainly something that we need to explore further.
16 We just had a interagency call to discuss mental
17 health in school specifically and access to mental
18 health for parents and children. I think part of the
19 next phase of our response will be that.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: To partner with
21 D79?

22 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yeah, we'll have to
23 look into that, but you know, I think we're-- because
24 we are much more flexible in terms of how we partner
25

across agencies, that's something we can certainly look at.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And Chair, can I ask one more question?

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Absolutely.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you. also our new-arrival older asylum-seekers, are we looking at transfer high schools for them, international high schools partnering up with them to-- because they have the infrastructure to support our newly-arrived students, and some of them as we know may be SIFE as well, which is Students with Interrupted Formal Education, so-- and our special needs population.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes. You know, I know that our team at DOE has been working a lot on figuring out, you know, how to best assist children, minors and families, particularly because they-- you know, they-- we've had to open a number of -- I think it's over 90 at this point-- emergency shelters and also our HERRCs. I mean, generally minors are placed in their local schools, but there are a vast number of opportunities, right, for asylum-seekers who are eligible the moment they're here for any of the

programs that immigrants are traditionally eligible for. Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you, Commissioner.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you, Council Member Joseph. I'd now like to go into this morning's announcement. The Mayor announced the creation of a new Office of Asylum-seeker Operations. Can you provide a brief description of the role of this office and how MOIA will be coordinating? Will be within MOIA? Would love to learn a little bit more.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, you know, we don't have details about where it will be housed. I think that's an ongoing conversation, but it is an office that's meant to centralize the work even further. I think we've been a rapid response mode since asylum-seekers began to arrive. Asylum-seekers began to arrive around this time last year, but not in large numbers until around I think June, and so we've been in rapid response mode, and a lot members from my team and at other agencies have, you know, I think have added this to their portfolio and to their work, and it's-- I don't want to say it's taken away,

1 but you know, we've-- we have a lot of priorities to
2 still look at, right? And so this is meant to
3 alleviate some of that. Centralized work being--
4 allow other-- everyone's who's been working on this
5 day and night to breathe a little bit, right, and
6 continue to provide the assistance that asylum-
7 seekers need, especially if, you know, or when more
8 asylum-seekers arrive. There's a lot of unknowns
9 about what will happen the next few months, and so we
10 want to plan accordingly. This office will operate
11 a-- what do they call it, a reception center--
12 arrival center that will ideally be open 24/7, that--
13 able to welcome asylum-seekers whether they arrive
14 early in the morning, late at night. That's
15 something that we've learned from our experience at
16 Port Authority and. you know, it's been now 10 months
17 thereabout that we've used Port Authority to be able
18 to welcome asylum-seekers. I think we want to do
19 this in a more organized way, whereas people can
20 provide being able to access all kinds of services
21 right away. But we'll continue to work as we have
22 until we have that in place, and more details are
23 forthcoming.
24

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: So, will there-- do you know if there'll be like a Commissioner appointed to this or the structure of this new office, or is that still information to be rolled out?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I think that's information to be rolled out. I think, you know, it'll certainly have staff and a director, and I think that it'll also be charged to think through-- my understanding is, you know, the space is available throughout the City. I mean, we've leased over 90 hotels. We've turned them into shelters. So there's only limited capacity, so we have to continue to search for more space where people can be housed, sheltered, and then yeah, that the logistics is just-- it's quite significant. And Health + Hospitals has been taking the lead. They've done tremendous work in setting up HERRCs. Emergency Management has played a leading role, as well. And so we just want to--we want to continue to work together. I think this office will help alleviate some of the pressure in all of us.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Yeah for sure.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: But we'll certainly share information as we learn more.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: We look forward to that. This Council has proposed some legislation to create an Office of Refugees and so we're really delighted to see that the Admin is dedicating its time to creating an entity really to look after and provide the service needs to asylum-seekers. I understand that resettlement efforts will be a core function of this office. Do you know if the office will cover costs related to re-ticketing? It, of course, has been deeply troubling that to-date the City has struggled to cover any of these costs. And in my earlier hearings, we learned that the Administration had not covered any costs and our organizational partners, grassroots groups covered many, many thousands of dollars including TLC and artists, athletes, and activists. Do you have information about the role this office will play around re-ticketing?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: you know-- yes. The-- we have an existing program that re-tickets individuals who come forward and wish to have that support and it's helped hundreds of people get re-ticketed elsewhere. And again, to clarify, we don't

encourage people to go elsewhere. We don't promote any specific location.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's great.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: But you know, it's-- we want to support people, connect to their family members or networks around the country. Again, we-- a lot of people arrive here because it was really the only option. Once people are here, I think they realize many different things about living here. You know, both its expensive and maybe like they wish to be closer to their family and so on. I think we're exploring different options for resettlement, and this is very common in the refuge space, but I think localities are interested in making sure that asylum-seekers have work permits, you know, and they've-- they have the assistance that they needed to submit their asylum applications, so that when relocated that they are able to connect with available work. And listen, a lot of localities who've lost population over the last decades are looking for people, actually, and they're looking for workers, and so there is interest, but again, you know, the Federal Government needs to expedite these work

permits so that people are able to arrive and work and connect to these industries.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: On work authorizations, I know that Congress recently introduced legislation to go from 180 days to 30 days. Have you all taken a position on that, or how are you working closely to really ensure that we get to a position where folks aren't having to wait so many months?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: [inaudible] taken a position, but I'd say that anything that expedites work permits faster is-- it's encouraging, and we believe there are many ways that the Federal Government can make that possible, beyond like legislation, because as you know, legislation in congress, you know, might not be the quickest solution. But we certainly-- I mean, I think-- all asylum-seekers we've spoken with, they want to get to work, and unfortunately, some of those who are connecting to informal work, they run-- I mean, they run the risk of impacting their asylum claims, and I mean, obviously-- it's working in the informal economy is always really tough, right? And so we know that that is happening, and so we want to make

sure that those work permits are expedited as soon as possible.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Could you provide us with the Office's budget for FY24 and the out-years? This is for the asylum-seekers operations.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: For MOIA or for the asylum-seekers?

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: the asylum-seekers operations, the new office that is about to be created?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Oh, we don't-- we don't have that available. I mean, the office was just announced today and I don't believe there's a budget, a specific budget attached to it.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay. So you don't have information about both the budget and how much staff would be hired to fill this office?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: No.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Defer to City Hall for those [inaudible].

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. Were you all engaged in the creation of this office? I'm just trying to understand sort of, like, the role you all

1 played to help inform the need to create that
2 separate office, and then how much coordination will
3 be happening between those two offices, yours and the
4 Office of Asylum Seekers, since there's clear
5 overlap, and it might be very difficult to tease out
6 exactly what it is Office of Asylum-seeker Operations
7 is doing and what it is exactly that MOIA is doing?

9 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, this idea--
10 the Blueprint came about as the Mayor and I visited
11 the US/Mexico border and we-- you know-- well, we
12 heard and saw made us think that, well we need a-- we
13 need this blueprint, right, to gather all our ideas.
14 And you know, I think start planning for what we've
15 began to call steady [sic] state approach. So moving
16 from an emergency response to steady state approach.
17 And the idea for the Office that will take on the
18 operational role came about when we were discussing a
19 blueprint, and thinking through, well how do we
20 centralize efforts? You know,, because right now DH--
21 - you know, Department of Homeless Services is doing
22 one thing, H+H is doing another, MOIA's doing
23 another. We all work fantastically together and
24 we're in constant communication, you know, weekly
25 calls and many different calls to coordinate, but I

1 think as we move into a steady state approach, we'll
2 need a central body that owns and where all of this
3 stuff lives. But you know, we don't have those
4 details yet, and I think we'll likely be meeting soon
5 to discuss what that looks like. But we've been told
6 that MOIA will continue to have a significant role.
7 This is not us pulling back. In fact, you know, we'll
8 probably-- yeah, we'll have a significant role. So
9 will H+H and so on until we start on-boarding people
10 for this office. And you know, I think we're
11 exploring locations for this new reception center.
12 It'll take some time.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. So you don't
15 yet know where the arrival center is located?

16 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: No.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Are you able to share
18 which locations are being considered at this time?

19 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: No, I don't have
20 the details, but I could say that, you know, we're
21 always scattering out locations for both HERRCs,
22 emergency shelters, and now this base. You know, we
23 continue to work on specifically our Navigation
24 Center at the Red Cross in Midtown and that's been
25

great, but increasingly our work is happening at the satellite sites spread across the City.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Will this center be a drop-in location with appointments, or will there be folks who are sleeping overnight? Could you-- do you have information about that?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I don't have details about that, but because the idea is that it'll be open 24/7. You know, we'll have presumably, you know, staff there to be able to welcome asylum-seekers. And again a lot of these details need to be hashed out, but we needed to have a centralized body to be able to help us coordinate these efforts. And again, we'll continue to work with the network of nonprofit partners throughout the city because frankly people are relocating throughout the City in need of support in their neighborhoods.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: so, basically right now what this would do is take away the Port Authority arrival hub, is that what this is doing or is it replacing the Navigation Center?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I think one of the ideas is yes, that it will I think add capacity to what's happening at the Port Authority. And again,

1
2 this is also looking ahead for the possibility of
3 more buses arriving from the border. We just don't
4 know what will happen in the coming months with Title
5 42 being lifted and everything else happening. It's
6 best to be prepared. We also-- we don't want to be
7 alarmists, but we don't want to let our guard down.
8 We want to have a plan in place.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Sure. And I'm just
10 curious, I guess, why this will be a separate office
11 and not one that's embedded in MOIA and add capacity
12 to what you all are already doing to expand MOIA's
13 capacity. You all have been experts on supporting
14 and welcoming asylum-seekers from day one, and so I
15 am trying to-- while I'm of course motivated and
16 really delighted to hear about the news that there
17 will be dedicated people really assessing,
18 evaluating, and guiding us through how to support
19 asylum-seekers. It does feel interesting or I'm
20 curious about why we would need to create a separate
21 office. So wondering if you've had conversations with
22 the Administration on creating a fully agency for
23 MOIA, and if not, why not?

24 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, this office
25 [inaudible] MOIA still-- it's not out of the-- I

mean, it's not out of a-- you say it's-- it might still be the case, but nothing has been determined. I think those conversations will happen within the next couple of weeks, you know. I think there is value in having an office that is able to pull from different agencies and different offices and centralize things. And we've been talking about this for some time, because it is quite a lot of work, especially as asylum-seekers-- more needs continue to come, you know, like education and long-term housing and legal assistances which is a huge one which will play, I think, an important role in. But again, you know, the-- we'll have more information in the coming weeks about this, and yeah, we haven't had more conversations with the Administration about MOIA becoming a larger entity.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. I'd like to acknowledge that we were joined by Council Member Krishnan. We are joined by Council Member Sanchez. OMB anticipates 2.8 billion dollars in total spending related to asylum-seekers in FY4, mostly for the cost of shelter. Can you explain why this funding is not included in the Preliminary Budget?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Sorry, can you repeat the question, just to be sure I got that right?

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That OMB is forecasting 2.8 billion dollars in total spending related to asylum-seekers in FY24, most of that going toward shelter and we'd like to know why this funding wasn't included in the Prelim Budget?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, I'll have to defer to OMB. You know, I know that the Director shared some information yesterday about the breakdown in terms of costs and ongoing costs. I think there's necessary need for projection out, you know, projecting the stuff out, especially was a lot of the unknowns in the coming months, but yeah, you know, this is an area we don't really have a-- you know, we don't really play role, and so I have to defer to OMB.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. This wraps up my questions around the Office of Asylum-seeker Operations. I was anticipating that you would have more information given this morning's announcement, but we look forward to following along and supporting to make it as adequate and functioning as possible.

Council Member Sanchez, do you have any questions?

Okay, great. So I'll move on to now priorities for

Fiscal 24. Last year you testified that MOIA is

working with city agencies and proposed a number of

initiatives. You emphasized that MOIA is working to

close the gap on language access and language

justice, or part of your priorities. As we enter the

24 Preliminary Budget with multiple challenges due to

the arrival of asylum-seekers, what are MOIA's

priorities for this budget season?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, I think

certainly as I described we'll play a significant

role in connecting asylum-seekers to support, our

legal support. you know, as Tom mentioned, you know,

we-- we'll have more information soon about our

support towards pro se clinics across the City, which

will take a lot of effort in bringing together not

just the legal service providers overseeing the legal

clinics, but also volunteers and other city agencies,

these would be ideal spaces to also connect them to

other city services that they might not be aware of.

It's just another opportunity to engage. But with

asylum-seekers pro-se clinics, they often take a

number of different visits, so it's not a one-off

1 situation with DACA all these many years ago. so
2 it'll be a big undertaking by our office, and I think
3 we'll-- you know, we'll want to build our internal
4 capacity to be able to do that at a much larger
5 scale. Language access continues to be a huge
6 priority for us. We are working to, as we discussed,
7 to build the team up, but not leave it up there at
8 that. We are actively thinking about-- well, once we
9 have additional capacity, what is it-- what more can
10 we do, especially connecting with, you know,
11 communities of languages that are rarely represented
12 in these efforts, you know, lower diffusion
13 languages, limited profusion-- pronounce it-- limited
14 diffusion.

15
16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Diffusion.

17 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: We recently
18 translated our resource guide roadmap to 52+
19 languages. We want to continue to make sure that we
20 have as many languages represented, not just in the
21 materials that we put out as MOIA, but throughout
22 mayoral offices and beyond. So that continues to be
23 a priority, again, hiring people who are connected
24 and very knowledgeable about these languages,
25 language communities, be able to really learn and

1 even convene communities that are interested in doing
2 more around language access. So those are really
3 significant, I think, undertakings. And of course,
4 really solidifying our role as the bridge between
5 city government and immigrant communities. I will
6 continue to be on the ground engaged with the various
7 different immigrant communities and language
8 communities across the five boroughs. I think it's
9 important to be aware that while the asylum-seeker
10 challenge continues to wake up a lot of our energy
11 and resources, we should not neglect other
12 communities who will have a lot of needs and
13 different needs perhaps, and so we'll pay special
14 attention to that work, as well.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you, could you
17 speak more about the pro-se clinics? Is that
18 something that is already underway within MOIA? Have
19 you been bringing in New Yorkers to become equipped,
20 skilled with the legal skills to support asylum-
21 seekers on their applications?

22 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, I'll let Tom
23 talk about this, if you wish, at length, because it
24 has been quite interesting to learn about the model
25 and also learn from providers that are already doing

1 that work. I recently visited a pro-se clinic with
2 the mayor out in Queens. This was self-organized, a
3 lot of volunteers, and many of the volunteers were
4 themselves asylum-seekers who had arrived many years
5 ago and have had that experience, and that's just so
6 critical. I think that's why this was an important,
7 sort of, development, you know. And that's really
8 frankly what I wanted to look at, you know, in terms
9 of developing this model. But I'll let Tom talk more
10 about it, and the work that's happening already is
11 just fantastic and we want to scale it, really.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Tom, and could you
14 provide me with a budget or any expenses that have
15 gone towards creating that clinic within MOIA. And
16 you're absolutely right, Commissioner, what a
17 beautiful story that asylum-seekers, or once asylum-
18 seekers have really stepped up here to provide these
19 pro-se clinics on their own. That's really a
20 powerful testament to the city that we are and the
21 strength of a Sanctuary City. Thanks for bringing
22 that model up.

23 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Thank you,
24 Commissioner. Thank you, Chair. Pro-se clinics are
25 a necessity given the scale of the need. So far we

1 have not funded any pro-se asylum clinics because
2 we're waiting to deploy the five million dollars
3 allocated in Fiscal 23 and 24. However we have
4 piloted two at the Navigation Center. Seeing small
5 numbers of clients in collaboration with community-
6 based legal service providers as well as pro-bono
7 attorneys, and so having the space at the Navigation
8 Center is valuable for that purpose. In addition to
9 those piloted asylum clinics, the Haitian Response
10 Initiative has been offering a series of Temporary
11 Protected Status or TPS application assistance
12 clinics to Haitian New Yorkers. And while that might
13 seem different from the asylum-seeker response, it's
14 actually pretty closely related because many of our
15 Haitian New Yorkers who have recently arrived are
16 also in removal proceedings potentially seeking
17 asylum, and if they qualify for TPS under the new
18 designation then that's a way to obtain work
19 authorization and also relief from deportation for a
20 temporary period. So we've been doing both. The
21 Haitian Response Initiative, Catholic Charities has
22 been running a lot of TPS clinics and serving a lot
23 of community members there.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's really great to know. So, to expand-- so right now, there are-- you've administered two clinics within the Navigation Center. Is there a certain threshold that you all are trying to do this year, and what will that cost?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: So as mentioned, we're currently in conversations in providers about the deployment of the five million dollars allocation for Fiscal 23 and 24, and part of those conversations involve deliverable targets, and so we can't discuss them now because they're not final, but we-- our goal and intention is to dramatically expand access to asylum application assistance and work authorization application assistance.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: That's great, and I look forward to getting some more information, and I'm glad that the pro se clinics are not the only model and you're actively looking to have the five million dollars allocated. I support this model, but know that we absolutely need folks who are specialized in the legal fields to be able to carry out these really dense nuanced applications and a process that is years long and requires expertise.

1 So, we'll look out for any budget-related piece in
2 order to better understand the pro-se clinics,
3 because that is something that I think this council
4 will want to push for and we want to see that housed
5 in MOIA.
6

7 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Sure
8 thing. Chair, one other note. It's worth noting
9 that the existing city-funded immigration legal
10 service programs are-- continue to help immigrant New
11 Yorkers both long-resided and newly-arrived, and so
12 you know, there are individuals that receive full
13 representation in asylum cases and various other case
14 types. So the City is doing a great deal to support
15 folks, and we're looking to expand upon that even
16 more.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great. So, now I
18 know the budget that MOIA has supports six fulltime
19 staff positions. It's something that like really
20 baffles the Council. The total of 750,000 dollars,
21 and then this budget reduces the headcount by one
22 position. However, the MOIA website shows job
23 postings for two executive positions, two external
24 affairs staffing, two policy advisors, and then
25 additional staffing for the We Speak NYC, which I

1 think you might have touched upon, and then the eight
2 language specialists. Were-- are there any new needs
3 that MOIA has asked for from OMB but did not receive
4 funding in the Preliminary Budget?

6 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, nothing has
7 been rejected, but you know, we're in ongoing
8 conversations about needs, our various needs, not
9 just of MOIA but also the immigrant communities so
10 that's-- those are ongoing discussions. We're really
11 able to have additional staff support because we
12 partner with DCAS and HRA, DSS to be able to, you
13 know, frankly have the additional capacity that would
14 need to do all the work that we're responsible to do,
15 and as crises happen and we continue to bring on
16 staff and that's important through those
17 partnerships. But I'll let-- I'll let Jas give you
18 sort of a break down and where we stand.

19 DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: Thank you,
20 Commissioner. Thank you, Chair. So, just to
21 clarify, so the six-- well, some and then in FY24 six
22 positions that you're looking at, those are just a
23 portion of MOIA's total staffing. Those are just
24 lines that-- staff that live for [inaudible] under
25 the Mayor's Office of-- under the Mayor's Office

1 budget lines, but we do have staff that will still
2 live-- you know, we have headcount under DSS as well
3 as DCAS, so in total you know, for this next Fiscal
4 Year we have 42 lines that encompasses the whole
5 office--
6

7 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: [interposing] Okay.

8 DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: that were
9 baselined. I know it's bit misleading just like in
10 terms of how you can spread-- you know, it's labeled,
11 but we do have six-- next Fiscal Year, six headcount
12 at the Mayor's Office, 10 under DSS and 26 under
13 DCAS. So that's what we're budgeted for next Fiscal
14 Year.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Got it. That's good
16 to know, but still confusing because despite MOIA
17 having this kind of umbrella situation where staff
18 live across different agencies, but are part of MOIA.
19 You don't coordinate on budget. The staffers-- do
20 the staffers who are in those other agencies work
21 with the agency that they're under coordinating with
22 budgets?

23 DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: No, I mean, our
24 budget, MOIA's budget is split between these three
25 agencies, right, but all of these--

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: [interposing] what are those three agencies, could you--

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: [interposing] Mayor's Office, DSS, and DCAS. That's where our, you know, our budget lives. But all of the staff that I mentioned, all the 42 positions, do report, you know, and work at MOIA. So they don't-- they're not--

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: [interposing] I see. I see. Okay.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: They're reporting to our office, but they are employees of those agencies. So,--

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: [interposing] It's just a budgetary breakdown, yeah.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay.

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: But they are MOIA staff.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: MOIA staff within those agencies of DCAS. They have to follow all procedures with those agencies.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood. I guess I was just trying to get clarity on given that they're under these other agencies, MOIA not having

specific say in the budget around those agencies, administering things that we consider are under MOIA is like the question or piece I find a little hard to understand. Council Member Sanchez?

COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Thank you so much, Chair, and thank you, Commissioner. I've been listening and multitasking to the hearing. So, Chair, I just want to thank you for always being thorough and having answered so many of the questions that we had. This actually may be a repeat, Commissioner, but I just wanted to see if I can get a better understanding. So, the Mayor's announcement earlier of an Office of Asylum-seeker Operations, do you have a sense yet of how the different functions are going to fit together? So, the HERRCs, the Navigation Centers, the work that MOIA has been doing, the work that the other agencies have been doing, how might that collaboration work?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, you know, I just shared that a lot of the details are forthcoming, so in the next couple of weeks we'll have more to share, but you know, we felt that there was a need to centralize a lot of the work that had been happening in what we refer to emergency

1 response, yeah, in emergency response mode to a
2 steady state mode of response. I think that is
3 naturally, you know, something that, you know, like
4 we thought would happen. It was basically early on
5 it was all hands on deck to try to respond to the,
6 you know, the thousands of people that arrived in a
7 few months, and so the thinking is we'll continue to
8 play our roles. You know, MOIA will continue to lead
9 on certain areas. H+H will continue to lead on
10 HERRCs and so on. But I think now we're trying to
11 look at how to make this most efficient and I think
12 for all of us I think allow us to really plan out,
13 right? We don't-- there's a lot of uncertainties
14 about what's going to happen in the next year, but we
15 do know that there is still a lot of need, and we'll
16 have more details forthcoming. You know, I think a
17 lot of these conversations will happen in the next
18 few weeks.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER SANCHEZ: Great, thank you.
21 And I just want to thank you for your continued
22 commitment to being responsive. This is an
23 incredibly difficult crisis, and I know that we as a
24 council continue to push the Administration, but it
25 does not fall on deaf ears or blind eyes that you all

1
2 have not shied away from this challenge and you're
3 trying to respond for them. Thank you. Thank you,
4 Chair.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. I will
6 move us into a question I have workforce development.
7 So I know today during the Mayor's Blueprint
8 announcement there was an announcement about the
9 innovative pilot with the Center for Discovery and
10 SUNY Sullivan to offer 100 asylum-seekers the
11 opportunity to live at the campus and receive
12 workforce training as they move through the federal
13 work authorization process. Could you tell us a
14 little bit more about this program? This seems very
15 exciting and a real opportunity, in particular to
16 engage SUNY in this work is excellent, is an
17 excellent move. Would love to learn one, about the
18 program. Is that going to be decided or is the--
19 who's creating this program? Is it MOIA? Is it the
20 Office of Asylum-seeker Operations? And how are the
21 100 asylum-seekers being selected, and then what
22 encompasses this workforce training? And then the
23 budget, of course, how much money will go towards
24 this?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: All the questions, you know, the program won't live as of now at MOIA. We're not coordinating this. I think it is a pilot program that's overseen by-- it's a workforce development team, and it is a pilot project, and a lot of--

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: [interposing] Is it a Workforce Development Team? Where's that?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I have to check. We have different work streams. So there's a work stream that works on legal services, another that works at workforce development.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I see, under MOIA you're saying? Or within MOIA?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: With-- across agencies. That's--

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: [interposing] Okay.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, as we, you know, try and coordinate across different agencies, we've created work streams. And so that's how we've managed throughout this 10 months. And so one of the areas that we've explored-- well, not necessarily much MOIA, but a few of the other teams, thinking about resettlement and thinking about strategic

1 partnerships, I think this partnership with SUNY has
2 come up. I don't have a whole lot of details, but I
3 do think that it's exciting to be able to partner
4 with institutions like SUNY and others to come up
5 with ways to support asylum-seekers. The challenge,
6 though-- I think this is the biggest takeaway-- the
7 challenge is work authorization. So many of the
8 opportunities that exist still require or would
9 require people to have work authorization in order to
10 tap into these projects. Like I said, there are a
11 lot of localities interested in working with refugees
12 because they need population. They need workers.
13 You know, they often have supporting nonprofits or
14 institutions, but without the work authorization or
15 people being designated as asylees [sic] or refugees,
16 it's quite difficult. This is partly the reason why
17 we really want to focus on making sure people are
18 tapping into, you know, the legal services available
19 to them to be then able to access these programs.
20 Unfortunately without that, it continues to be
21 difficult.

22
23 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood. I know
24 that there are various hurdles here, but at this time
25 around the specific initiative, you don't have

1 details on like how the 100 asylum-seekers are being
2 selected and/or other criteria who will administer,
3 and then what kind of workforce training? And of
4 course, I want to give a shout out to our community
5 partners in New York City who have been providing
6 trainings across various sectors, and also heard from
7 several organizations that they've been doing the
8 work around combatting or making sure that asylum-
9 seekers know what their rights are as they are
10 engaging in informal workplaces where they're more
11 prone and vulnerable to workplace harassment. And you
12 know, I think the City needs to do a much better job
13 in making New Yorkers aware of what their rights are,
14 irrespective of your immigration status. You have
15 the right to work and you have the right to a safe
16 workplace without harassment and discrimination. So
17 I'd love to learn a little bit more about any Know
18 Your Rights trainings or informational that are
19 available to help workers, particularly undocumented
20 asylum-seeker workers understand that they have a
21 right to a safe work place and then more on this
22 program, especially around the budget for this
23 program.
24
25

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: I think, you know, we'll be able to-- we'll follow up with more details that are available from the team that's working on this specifically. You know, I think part of what we will be doing in the next coming months is, you know, also presenting these opportunities to asylum-seekers and see, you know, how-- the level of interest, assessing how many asylum-seekers have been able to apply and also receive work authorization. So there's a lot more to do on our end to sort of understand, you know, the landscape, and frankly, you know, the eligibility, right? Because again, many of these programs require at the very least work authorization. So, you know, we'll provide more details as they become available. But on the workforce and worker rights issue, as you know, it's something very dear to me coming from that world, having ran a worker center for immigrant workers. And so part of what we did or what Catholic Charities has done with their subcontracts with the satellite sites across the City is provide them with the flexibility to also offer things like OSHA training or workers' rights information at these satellite sites, and that has been tremendously helpful for

1 many of our partner organization working on the
2 ground, because that is frankly a lot of what asylum-
3 seekers go to them for. And so, yes, it's-- again,
4 as we learn of asylum-seekers finding work in the
5 informal economy, I think we'll continue to make sure
6 that we're distributing that information in
7 partnership with the Department of Consumer and work-
8 - Affairs and Worker Protections.

10 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great. So, what
11 other services are being provided at the satellite
12 sites, the satellite sites and also the Navigation
13 Center?

14 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, again, that
15 was-- so, you know, the Catholic Charities manages
16 these satellite sites. They issue the contract, the
17 subcontracts. Catholic Charities has a scope of work
18 with us that requires a certain amount of case
19 management services, wrap-around services, and the
20 satellite sites are there to help Catholic Charities
21 meet those deliverables. But I would say generally
22 speaking, they're-- you know, I think the satellite
23 sites are there to support asylum-seekers navigate
24 life in New York and connect to city services and
25 other services available to them the moment they

arrive in New York regardless of immigration status.

And so like I said, one of the-- one of the components has been worker-- workforce development, connecting people to available training, connecting people to I think other communities that have gone through the same. So a lot of what's happening at these satellite sites, yes, is direct support, but also building community. I think that's essential.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Sure.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Often that's not totally captured in the scope of work, but I think the more people are connected to communities, I think that the better chance they have to thrive and also learn from others' experience. Did you have anything else?

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: I can add something. Thank you, commissioner. Thank you, Chair. Just to sort of give you a bit more detail, overview. We do have the Navigation Center. This was-- and the satellite sites. This was part of an emergency procurement that ultimately Catholic Charities was the vendor that was-- that wanted this bid, right? In the Navigation Center that's located in Hell's Kitchen, Catholic Charities, you know,

1 oversees operations. They provide intake, right, for
2 everyone that walks in. we also have a wider range
3 of services, IDNYC on site, Fair Fares, mental health
4 counseling, health insurance, school enrollment, and
5 just a few. There's a-- and also immigration legal
6 orientation. Then we also have the satellite network
7 that is actually 12 sites, five of which provide
8 comprehensive case management and the remainder--
9 seven provide workforce development, Know Your Rights
10 workshops, information and referral services as well
11 as direct assistance, and workforce development. So,
12 it-- you know, we tried to make sure that, you know,
13 folks get the most immediate and basic needs there,
14 right? And these are locations that are spread
15 throughout the five boroughs.

17 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood. And so
18 in Fiscal 2023 and 24 budgets included a funding of
19 6.7 million for the Navigation Center and 2.1
20 million. Does allocated budget account for increased
21 needs relative to FY23?

22 DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: So, for Fiscal
23 Year 23, right, it was \$6.7 million that was
24 allocated for the Navigation Center. We're still
25 assessing what the future will look like, right? So

1 we're-- we're still looking into that. I mean,
2 these are just, you know-- the volume of, right, that
3 all these satellite sites are seeing, yes, you know,
4 continues. You know, it's a lot, right? But so far
5 like we have-- you know, they have been able to serve
6 all the folks that have come in, and we continue to
7 be in conversations with OMB with regards to
8 additional needs, and that's definitely something
9 that we continue to assess and, you know, bring up
10 any needs to OMB.
11

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And then is there
13 funding or within this pot of money funding for
14 outreach? Do shelters and then HERRCs share details
15 for the nearest satellite site?

16 DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: So, we work very
17 closely together with HERRCs and shelters, you know.
18 We want to make sure that, you know, everyone has all
19 the information that they need. So, I can't speak
20 to, you know, what the shelters and the HERRCs have
21 allocated for outreach and what that looks like.
22 Unfortunately, we don't have those details, so we'll
23 defer to them, but in terms of constant
24 communication, you know, we work very closely with
25

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yeah, I have to say we work very closely with the HERRCs specifically, because that's sort of where, you know, those are meant specifically for asylum-seekers to get this wrap-around services. We've developed [inaudible] two-pager [sic] where all the satellite sites are listed, how to get in touch with them, how to access services, and also of course our main Navigation Center. That's available to all the HERRCs and all the DHS shelters. And I think we made it part of a blueprint, so it'll be in the back of the blueprint, too. we want to get this out as much as possible, of course, without overwhelming the nonprofits that are serving the satellites, and we're going to be consulting with them, asking for feedback, learning from their experience serving the satellite sites, and based on that I think we'll be able to make, you know, decisions as to, you know, the future of the use of satellite sites, but so far I mean, I think this is just tremendous work happening on the ground

And we might even expand, you know, to more additional satellite sites. And of course, the work

1 know, relevant information regarding the satellite
2 sites is shared across the board, right? And we also
3 hold weekly calls with agencies needs that are
4 actually present at the Navigation Center to ensure
5 that everyone knows what's happening at the satellite
6 sites where they're located. We did create, as
7 mentioned earlier, also the one-pager on all of the
8 satellite sites that is translated in 13 languages.
9 So in terms of outreach, we at MOIA have coordinated
10 across the board, you know, to ensure folks, you
11 know, what the services are at the satellite sites.

13 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Just to add to
14 that, I mean the-- I think it's-- to me, knowing what
15 I know now with the information available, Catholic
16 Charities oversees and manages the satellite sites,
17 but I know that they're in tremendous coordination
18 with them. But you know, it's not-- these satellite
19 sites are constantly busy. They've served over 4,000
20 people since we announced the satellite sites. They
21 work. I think they refer asylum-seekers whenever
22 they cannot help them themselves, they refer them
23 back to the Navigation Center, which has served over
24 11,000 people since we opened the center. So I
25 think, you know, once we start doing an analysis of

1 the data and the outcome of-- I think this work will
2 show that I think it's an effective model, right?
3 And it is a network, so they're not working in silos.
4 They are meant to be working very closely together.
5

6 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood. Could
7 you talk to us about the payments? Is there an
8 across-the-board standard for payments? We've heard
9 that some organizations are currently receiving
10 monthly payments while the others have not heard from
11 the Administration yet.

12 DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: I can-- so
13 Catholic Charities, right, is the main vendor. So
14 through the emergency procurement, you know, they
15 have a contract that lives in HRA and it's
16 administered by HRA, and that contract specifically
17 is reimbursement-based, right? I cannot speak to
18 what the payment method is between Catholic Charities
19 and its subcontractors, but at least in terms of like
20 the main contract, that's how it's set up, and that's
21 very standard to city contracts.

22 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay. So, is there a
23 long-term plan for Navigation Center and the
24 satellite sites?
25

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: As also the Commissioner mentioned, you know, we're still [inaudible] assessing what the next steps are, but you know, we hope to have more info on that very soon.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: We will be following that. Now, I'd like to turn to Promise NYC. This is childcare for undocumented families. Is funding included in the Preliminary Budget to continue and expand this initiative? We fought really hard to see 10 million dollars delivered to our undocumented families and this is a vital, vital service. We'd love to learn more about expansion and also enrollment data.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, I mean, I think yes, absolutely. Promise NYC I think was very important to make available for families that did not qualify for other forms of support. Our role really was to assist ACS and our other partners understand the nature of the situation and talk about, you know, the groups and the communities doing the work on the ground. We don't have available data specific to the program so we'll have to defer to ACS to answer those questions, but we do believe that it was an important

1 initiative and it's helped tremendously to those
2 families who haven't had that support because of
3 their immigration status.
4

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Sorry that I was a
6 little distracted hearing your response. Will you
7 repeat?

8 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: yeah, no, I was
9 just saying that our role was to assist and advise
10 ACS--

11 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: [interposing] ACS.

12 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: on, you know, the
13 situation with respect to undocumented families who
14 had no access to these services because of their
15 status, and I think it was an-- has been an important
16 program, and I think-- moving forward we'd love to do
17 more, you know, with these issues. We'd love to
18 assist our sister agencies in making sure that
19 immigrant families of various immigration statuses
20 are supported regardless of their status, but the
21 specific data lives at ACS. We don't have-- we don't
22 have it with us, but we can-- we'll defer to them,
23 and you know, they can submit that information to
24 you.
25

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Does the same go for the piece about funding?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes, yes. I don't-- well, I'll defer to them to answer specific information about the funding. Again, our role was to advise and we worked really well together in thinking through this issue, because it's a really important one, especially as, you know-- well, it's a big challenge for our communities not to have childcare available to them and these essential programs.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Absolutely. And so given your role as an advisor, have you used existing funding to do the coordination with ACS, or is there an allocation that is specifically about advising on Promise NYC?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Well, we don't have a specific funding ourselves, and generally when it has to do-- when an issue has to do with immigrants or undocumented immigrants or a specific community within the larger immigrant community, our sister agencies and offices tap us for expertise and advise on how to approach the situation, and that's exactly what happened with Promise NYC.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Could you share enrollment data for NYC Care?

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: So, while we look for that, I think similar to Promise NYC, NYC Cares lives under H+H. You know, we posted a number of activities with H+H and NYC Cares. We have greet working relationship, Jonathan Jimenez, Executive Director, and I. I think we hosted an ethnic media roundtable to promote NYC Cares, specifically the change of policy, the residency policy which we moved from six months to as soon as someone arrives to New York. They are eligible to apply for NYC Cares. And as you know, H+H manages the HERRCs, so we have a good relationship both NYC Cares and the whole system in general. But I do not have specific financial data, but I think we'll share what we have.

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: Yeah, I can just briefly just to add what the Commissioner had, we, you know, we collaborate with H+H and, you know, closely Mostly on supporting the outreach piece for the program, right? But in terms of actually managing the contract is something that they do. There's currently 22 NYC Care vendors, you know, that are doing this type of work, and but I would defer to

1
2 them in terms of more details. What we do have is
3 that there are over 110,000 active members enrolled
4 into NYC Care and thousands of renewals, but in terms
5 of more specific, we would defer to H+H.

6 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Understood. To wrap
7 up, could you share which of the initiatives you all
8 have budget leadership over, just so I have a clear
9 understanding. It's good to know the sort of
10 discrepancies here, as you've also highlighted in
11 your testimony, but would want to just as a closing,
12 if you could identify the specific programs that you
13 all administer and have data around.

14 COMMISSIONER CASTRO: A lot of the
15 programs that we were able to speak at length to, for
16 instance ActionNYC and other immigration legal
17 services, but also support services, programs that
18 are often initiated as a result of a, you know, a
19 crises, right? So, for instance the Haitian Response
20 Initiative or the Ukrainian Response Initiative, you
21 know, our work around asylum-seekers, Action NYC,
22 that's done tremendous work, ActionNYC is only a part
23 of a larger pool of money that the City has available
24 for legal services, but ActionNYC serves as sort of
25

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: so, ActionNYC is one
that you have--

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: data and budget--

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: budgetary decisions

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Yes. And so, you
to finish my thought here, while ActionNYC
ould the full sort of investment of the City
ervices, it is a way to channel people into
ent programs. And so we do have oversight
NYC, but there's a lot more going on,
y at the HRA. So we work closely with HRA.
to put it in these three buckets. And so
re language services initiatives,
- not language services-- language-- issues
language access, and We Speak which is
language program, and so those we were able
t length to because we oversee those

1 programs. And then thirdly, think more like quality
2 of life programs that we oversee like the Know Your
3 Rights initiative that looks to educate immigrant
4 communities about their rights initiative that looks
5 to educate immigrant communities about their rights
6 and available services to them. But you know, in
7 that area we do advise and partner with a lot of
8 different city agencies that target, you know,
9 improving the life of immigrants here in New York
10 City. So it's a mix, you know, because we're--
11 again, the history of the organization over these
12 couple of decades of this iteration is really to
13 advise and assist the mayor and mayor offices, but
14 because of the many crises that have occurred over
15 the years, we've added initiatives that are meant to
16 address a gap in need or emergency or crisis. This
17 is why it looks like this. But again, we've played
18 an increasingly bigger role in like responding to
19 crises. Like, early last year the Bronx fire was
20 sort of like my first day on the job having to
21 respond to that and thinking through well how do we
22 best support immigrant communities impacted by these
23 situations. Often, yeah, we're the first on the
24

ground because we know-- we're the experts in these areas, right? Not just policy, but also--

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: [interposing] No, absolutely, and that's why my line of questioning is really getting at the fact that for our immigrant policy-making and expanding on the budgets needed that MOIA should play a role more than just advising, that it should be-- it should have more decision-making powers around budget and having data pertaining to these other programs that are housed in other agencies. That wraps up my questions. Thank you all so much for your thorough detailed responses. Deeply, deeply appreciate the work you do, the work we'll continue to do to support asylum-seekers and all immigrant communities in our city. Thank you so much.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you, Chair.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TORTORICI: Thank you, Chair.

COMMISSIONER CASTRO: Thank you, Council Members.

DEPUTY CHIEF SANCHEZ: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Our first panel will be Comptroller Lander.

COMPTROLLER LANDER: Good afternoon. Do you want to swear me in?

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: You're all good to go. Limited time.

COMPTROLLER LANDER: Alright, thank you, Chair Hanif. Thank you for convening this important hearing and for all your leadership on this critical issue. I'm here today because a time to your hearing today, we're releasing this report: Accounting for Asylum-seekers, An Overview for City Budgeting and Contracting to Provide Services to New-arrivals. It is the most-detailed collection to-date of what we're actually spending here. It looks at all of the contracts we were able to collect information on that have been started through emergency procurement. So it covers 83 contracts at seven different agencies, most of them 55 contracts at the Department of Homeless Services totally \$447 million dollars, but also contracts at NYCEM and H+H. To me, the most-- and actually every one of them is listed in the appendix and online. You can see all the details, including who the contractors were, the terms of the contract. We also break down per-diem rates. For example, the per-diem rate for DHS shelters procured

1 under emergency procurement for families with
2 children is now \$339 a day. So, some of this affirms
3 that the Administration has been saying that we're
4 spending quite a lot of money meeting our obligation
5 to provide shelter and safe haven for folks seeking
6 asylum. What I-- what we found most significant,
7 though, is that over 99 percent of what we've
8 contracted for is for shelter and its ancillary
9 services, food, etcetera, which means well under one
10 percent is for helping people get on their feet, get
11 out of shelter, file their asylum-seekers
12 applications, file for work authorization, get
13 workforce development, get on pathways to permanent
14 housing. So what we really recommend is that while
15 the last eight months have genuinely been an
16 emergency that required rapid sailing up of the
17 provision of shelter, we urgently need to turn our
18 focus on helping people get out of shelter, and we
19 recommend a two-prong strategy for doing so. for
20 asylum-seekers, what that means is launching an all-
21 hands effort and some of this was in the Blueprint
22 announcement this morning, it's just it was down at
23 about 0.4, and it's unclear to me how rapidly it's
24 going to launch. Time is the essence here, because
25

folks have only one year from the date of their arrival in the country to file their asylum application. I think a lot of folks don't even know that because no one has kind of given them that information. Once they do file that application, they're eligible for their work authorizations 180 days later. So it's in everyone's interest to make sure every single migrant in our shelter system-- someone comes knocks on their door, whether they've been to the Nav Center or not, whether they're in the H+H system or the DHS system, make sure they know this information. Make sure they know the date by which they have to file, that they know their availability of legal counsel or that they could file it pro-se, help them file their work authorization paperwork once that's done, and then help them identify workforce development pathways to work. And then the second thing that we really need to do is take an emergency approach to helping everybody in shelter find permanent housing, not only asylum-seekers, but the 50,000 folks that were there in shelter before folks began arriving here, and we recommend a series of things we can do expanding CityFEPS eligibility, getting ready now to launch a

housing access voucher program, assuming the state includes one. I talked to a number of shelter providers who had launched programs focusing on folks that had been in shelter for a long time, and it had pretty good success at helping them find permanent housing so that we could help everyone regardless of whether they're asylum-seekers or New Yorkers who have been in shelter for a long time move into permanent housing and get out of the shelter system. Obviously that helps families on their pathway to economic security and it will help our city as well reduce the number of hotels we've rented, reduce the footprint of our shelter system, and save some of the about \$2 billion dollars a year that this increase is costing us. So, that's this report today. It's got a lot of great information. Happy to talk to you and others about it as you digest it, and happy to work together with you and hopefully with the Administration as well to execute this pivot while we continue to provide safe shelter for people who need it to dramatically increase the resources. And a couple of people have said to me where's the money going to come from to help provide those additional services, but it will save us money. Every family

that we can help get out of shelter, we are saving money in the long-term. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much.

We are really thrilled to receive this report. I had some time to look over it earlier, and you know what's wonderful is that this work around legal services, both the mix of pro-bono through providers and pro-se from volunteers to the legislative work around expanding CityFEPS is happening or underway. So this would build on the good work already happening. Could you share kind of like the-- what's needed for us to achieve this? How much time are we looking here? It is urgent. What's that-- what's that looking like?

COMPTROLLER LANDER: Yeah. Well, first I will say, I think it will cost substantially more than the amounts people have been talking about so far. This is not a five or \$10 million dollar effort. We're talking about spending two billion dollars annually to shelter people. so, if spending something more on the order of \$50 or \$100 million dollars will scale the effort up to make sure everyone can get a pathway to work authorization will actually save money versus if we don't do that

1 because we're pennywise and pound foolish [sic]. So
2 one is I think more resources will need to be on the
3 table. We need to leverage the existing contacts we
4 have, all those folks in NYFUP, in the New York
5 Family Immigrant Unity Project. There was a
6 conversation with them early on, but they felt that
7 the level of resources wasn't sufficient to enable
8 them to provide representation. ActionNYC is also a
9 great platform, because again, I think what needs to
10 happen here is we need understand, alright, you know,
11 those 30,000 people, how many households are they in?
12 What will it take us to knock on every door? It's
13 the kind of thing that the Public Engagement Unit in
14 City Hall actually has experience doing on things
15 like 3K. It is kind of all hands effort that deploys
16 city staff, volunteers, and contracted nonprofits and
17 legal service provides with a uniform script
18 essentially. And one thing we found is there's
19 actually four different databases that are being used
20 because DHS has one, H+H has one, the Nav Center has
21 one. So a coordinated system that enables us to like
22 reach all of those people, go through a checklist,
23 make sure they know what their options are. It's a
24 big effort. I don't want to like sugarcoat it, but
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1 be added in 23. But yeah, I mean, I think it's you
2 know, on the \$50 million dollars scale probably in
3 both years to get started. This is where I think
4 it'll be great. You know, and you asked a lot of
5 these questions of the Commissioner and didn't get
6 the answer because the section in the Blueprint that
7 is about this, it speaks to many of these issues,
8 providing more contracted legal services, providing
9 pro-bono and pro-se clinics. So, I think asking them
10 okay, so what's the cost of that and how soon is it
11 scaling up is really what is critical here.

12
13 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great. Thank you so
14 much.

15 COMPTROLLER LANDER: Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Appreciate you.

17 COMPTROLLER LANDER: Take good care.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: As we proceed with
19 public testimony, I want to inform everyone that we
20 will be limiting public testimony today to two
21 minutes each. For in-person panelists, please come
22 up to the table once your name has been called. For
23 virtual panelists, once your name is called a member
24 of our staff will unmute you and the Sergeant at Arms
25 will set the timer and give you the go-ahead. Please

1 wait for the Sergeant to announce that you may begin
2 before delivering your testimony. I will now call
3 our first panel. Mark Valinoti, Terry Lawson, Jodi
4 Sizemore [sp?], Heather Axford, and Nevien
5 Swailmyeen, and apologies for any names that I mess
6 up.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: You all could come
9 up. We are keeping strict to the two-minute time,
10 and we'll be reading your full remarks. Where are we
11 starting? Mark, you can begin.

12 MARK VALINOTI: Thank you very much for
13 the opportunity to testify. My name is Mark Valinoti
14 and I'm the Managing Immigration Attorney at NMIC.
15 Our written testimony goes into NMIC's mission and
16 services that we've provided since 1979 as a
17 community-based settle house. Our immigration team
18 provides free advice, advocacy, and representations
19 to the community on apps such as naturalization,
20 family-based petitions, adjustment of status, and
21 humanitarian forms of relief like U-Visa and BALA
22 [sic] cases. Limited in unsustainable funding creates
23 uncertainty in the delivery of these services. In the
24 current Fiscal Year the city funds our immigration
25 work through several funding initiatives listed in

our written testimony. While this support allows us to provide a variety of services that impact thousands of New Yorkers, the need in our community remains high. The increase in new arrivals, for instance, has placed an additional strain on nonprofits already at capacity. However, immigrant service funders have signaled a reduction in contracts and funding at a time when capacity needs to be expanded. MOIA which manages the successful citywide ActionNYC program announced all partner agencies in January the reduction of contract extensions from three years to one. Another funder, DYCD released a contract in 2022 requiring more immigrant services while reducing dollars per case. These reductions have caused great uncertainty in the future of NMIC and other agencies' immigration programs. Many case types require years of representation, and without secure funding we are forced to contemplate winding down or even ending current representation. This funding insecurity has deleterious effects on the overall health of agencies. Hiring and retaining staff becomes an even greater challenge when their salary depends on a contract renewal. In order to meet these challenges,

we require a reliable baseline of funding to develop a secure infrastructure of support, and we can only do that with the City's help and increased support for funding immigrant legal services. Thank you very much.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much.
You can go ahead.

NEVIEN SWAILMYEEN: My name is Nevien Swailmyeen and I am the Health Justice Advocate with the Health Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. NYLPI is privileged to be a part of the City Council's immigrant health initiative, and we thank you for that support. We appreciate the City Council's leadership and defending the human rights of immigrants and immigrants this past year. In this budget process we call on the Council to continue defending vital city resources and services and investments from budget cuts. With the IBO's announcement of a 4.9 billion dollar surplus this year, now is not the time to retreat from our City's sustainability and equity goals. Today, I am here to ask the council to continue their support by renewing funding for the Immigrant Health Initiative which has saved lives and

improved health across the City. Moreover, the recent migrant crisis has only increased the need for initiatives that champion immigrant rights and facilitate access to services including healthcare and legal assistance. City Council funding supported NYLPI and implementing and expanding programs and resources aimed at improving the health and quality of care for seriously-ill immigrant and non-citizen New Yorkers. For over 400,000 New Yorkers who are undocumented and uninsured, access to healthcare is scarce and the most marginalized and very sick often go without medical care. Your support has led to increased enrollment by eligible immigrants and state-funded comprehensive health insurance via Medicaid and the essential [sic] plan. The improved access to health insurance has led to life-changing effects on the lives of our clients. Furthermore, their enrollment often results in cost-savings for the City, the State and our safety-net healthcare system as people can resume work and productive lives. With the support of City Council funding we launched our pilot Transplant Justice Pipeline with the kidney transplant program at SUNY Downstate Medical Center. Many people in need of kidney

transplants are denied necessary life-saving healthcare furthering racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare based on misinformation, healthcare inaccessibility and mistreatment of immigrant patients. We at NYLPI thank you Chairperson Hanif and the Committee for giving us the opportunity to present testimony today for this tremendous assistance and we ask that funding continue for the Fiscal Year 2024.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Terry, you can begin when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

TERRY LAWSON: I'm still muted. Oh, [inaudible]. Good afternoon. My name is Terry Lawson, and I'm the Executive Director of UnLocal. We provide community education, outreach, legal representation to New York City's undocumented communities. I am also the co-founder and steering committee member of the Bronx Immigration Partnership and Co-founder of the Pro Se Plus Project. Thank you for convening this important hearing. In collaboration with our partners at Central American Legal Assistance, Catholic Migration Services, MOCA [sic], Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid, NYLAG, African

Communities Together, and the Robin Hood Foundation and the New York Community Trust, we launched the Pro Se Plus Project in January to help recently-arrived migrants access Pro Se legal assistance, advocate for themselves, and understand their rights and obligations. The Pro Se Plus Project fills the gaps caused by the reality that there are not enough legal services lawyers to provide full representation to every asylum-seekers in New York City. With its innovative approach, PSPP teaches asylum-seekers how to represent themselves and how to ensure that important deadlines are not missed. By helping asylum-seekers file their applications pro se and with the assistance of community supporters, PSPP makes it possible for people to access lawful employment authorization which ensures a more robust workforce in New York City and allows people to exit the shelter system more quickly. We are conducting legal screenings and consultations, delivering educational presentations to migrants and community supports, providing advice and counsel, and organizing pro se assistance clinics to help recent arrivals meet requirements in a complicated and ever-changing immigration legal landscape. We are seeking

1 City Council support in FY24 to expand our reach and
2 continue to innovate to meet emergent needs. UnLocal
3 provides free high-quality legal services for New
4 York's most vulnerable immigrants, handling 1,200
5 legal matters last year for immigrants seeking
6 asylum, DACA, Sage [sic], lawful permanent residency,
7 and relief from removal, work authorization and more.
8 Our Queer Immigrant Justice Project which receives
9 support from the LGBT Caucus at the City Council
10 works with--

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
13 expired.

14 TERRY LAWSON: LGBTQIA+ immigrants
15 eligible for asylum.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you, Terry.

17 TERRY LAWSON: Thank you so much.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Heather, you can
19 begin when the Sergeant calls time.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

21 HEATHER AXFORD: Hi, thank you so much.
22 My name's Heather Axford. I'm the Director of Central
23 American Legal Assistance, and I really appreciate
24 this time. I know there was a lot of questions about
25 pro se asylum clinics, so I wanted to touch on that.

1 We did a pro se asylum clinic in February. We are
2 doing another one tomorrow morning at the Navigation
3 Center, and you know, the experience we have thus
4 far-- you know, we've been working in collaboration
5 with our pro se plus partners as Terry mentioned, but
6 you know, I'm convinced that this mode of service
7 provision is really important, but also asylum
8 clinics are really different than other legal
9 clinics, and so I just wanted to kind of mention
10 that. You know, asylum applications are extremely
11 complicated. They're extremely high-stakes. It is
12 so important that prior to filing an asylum
13 application, any person has robust one-on-one advice
14 and counsel. The people, the volunteers who
15 participate need to be trained and it's fairly
16 intensive training, and frankly, you kind of want
17 volunteers that are coming again and again and
18 gaining experience. They take a long time. I mean,
19 asylum applications take a long time for experienced
20 providers. I've been doing this for 15 years. It is--
21 - you know, it is an hour's long process with asylum-
22 seekers. It's a really important and meaningful one,
23 but it's not something that is done quickly. So we
24 have been doing smaller clinics, and I think that's
25

1 really important because there's a lot of supervision
2 on the back end as well. You want to review the
3 application. Submitting the application is really
4 complicated right now because it might be with the
5 court, it might be with an immigration office, but
6 there's a lot of chaos right now and figuring out
7 where to file and how to make sure applications are
8 properly filed takes a level of expertise that you
9 really want experienced attorneys involved with.
10 We've done-- we did the clinic last month and
11 tomorrow at the Navigation Center, thanks in large
12 part to Tom at MOIA--

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
15 expired.

16 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We'll now go to the
18 next panel which will include Theodore Moore,
19 Aracelis Lucero, and Lisha Luo Cai.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: oh, I had questions
21 for the first panel, actually.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay. Never mind.

23 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Because I know you
24 were limited in time. And so I actually I want to
25 learn a little bit more. Start off with Terry. Can

TERRY LAWSON: Absolutely, and thank you, Council Member Hanif. So, we have currently secured funding from Robin Hood Foundation and from the New York Community Trust. The New York Community Trust mentioned this at the Welcome NYC announcement last week. We have received funding. We-- without sort of getting into the details of how much money we've received from Robin Hood and from the New York community Trust, the current amount of funding is able to cover about-- we're doing training. So it has four different components. We have trainings for community members, training for community supporters, screenings, and pro se clinics as Heather was discussing. So, that funding is able to cover training-- community trainings for migrants themselves, about 12 trainings, reaching 1,500 people and then-- we're doing about six community member trainings, reaching somewhere between 900-- I'm sorry, 95 to 130 people. We're screening 2,200

1 people for-- to screen them, provide triage,
2 understand what they may be eligible for, and then
3 we're providing four to eight clinics with pro se
4 clinics which Heather was just mentioning, expecting
5 to reach about 800 people. so that is what the
6 funding from Robin Hood and the New York Community
7 Trust is able to cover, and we are seeking funding--
8 our partner organizations have sought discretionary
9 applications or filed discretionary applications with
10 the Council to help us expand so that we can provide
11 even more services.

13 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And then, if you
14 could go into what are the benefits and then
15 challenges that exist within this model.

16 TERRY LAWSON: So the benefits of this
17 model we believe is to remove the role of gatekeeper
18 that so often is the role that lawyers play, to say
19 that because you don't have a lawyer you can't
20 represent yourself in Immigration Court, you can't
21 have the information. So the benefit is really to
22 empower people to give them the information that they
23 need so that they are confident that they're filing a
24 589 application that has been either-- they've either
25 gone through the pro se clinics in order to have that

1 attorney helping them fill that out, or they've gone
2 to a training and learned what needs to go into that
3 asylum application. In addition, teaching people how
4 to fill out employment authorization applications and
5 ensuring that when they do appear for their hearings
6 for their master calendar hearings and for their
7 individual hearings, that they understand what
8 they're there to do. they understand how they are
9 going to be asked to tell their story, under what
10 circumstances, and really get people to a place where
11 even if they don't have a lawyer standing beside
12 them, that they are not powerless.

14 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And--

15 TERRY LAWSON: [interposing] The
16 challenges is that it's difficult to scale and to
17 build at the same time that we are working on
18 creating the project. so we often-- the analogy that
19 we are building the plane while flying it at the same
20 time and trying to get as many resources as possible
21 into this project into as many partners as possible,
22 into the hands of as many partners as possible so
23 that there can be as great of reach as we need given
24 the number of asylum-seekers whose asylum-- whose
25 one-year filing deadlines are fast approaching.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And so have the providers who are receiving funding within this project developed maybe a proposal for scaling up?

TERRY LAWSON: So we have been writing many proposals. We have-- we shared our proposal with the City Council at the December hearings, so that's actually part of my testimony from the December hearing, and I can attach it to this testimony as well. That was the proposal that we submitted to the Community Trust and to Robin Hood. We have been working on creating more proposals so that we can show sort of what a scale-- scaling up would look like, but that is something that we're absolutely working on all the time.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. And Heather, do you have anything to add on the questions I had for Terry on just the benefits and challenges of the pro se model?

HEATHER AXFORD: I think Terry explained it really well. Yeah, I don't-- I don't have anything to add. I mean, I think the biggest-- I think the biggest, one of the biggest benefits is that once they file their-- or have their I589's filed timely, which is a huge benefit, but then five

1 months later they'll be able to get work
2 authorization, which you know, from the-- we talk to
3 about 200 people a month and that is first and
4 foremost on people's minds. So I know that for the
5 community of recently-arrived immigrants that's a big
6 one.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And then how many
9 people are volunteering in the clinics, the pro se
10 clinics on average?

11 HEATHER AXFORD: So, the two that we had--
12 - so we had--

13 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: [interposing] Or like
14 how many people are volunteering, and then how many
15 people are coming to receive the support services?

16 HEATHER AXFORD: So, for, like for a
17 clinic tomorrow, we have about 20 participants where
18 the folks whose I589-- you know, were going to have
19 I589's field for them, and then about 11 volunteers.
20 And you know, as I mentioned before, we're trying to
21 keep it somewhat small because of the unique nature
22 of I589s and that's about what we did in our February
23 clinic as well, and that felt like a good amount of
24 both people and participants.
25

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And then what's the cost for doing the-- providing these clinics for your organization? Like, how much is it costing to run one of these clinics per month or on a regular basis?

HEATHER AXFORD: You know, I think that, like, figuring out that cost is something that we're working on. As Terry said, we're building the plane while we're flying it, and so at this point I'm not sure I could give you an exact number, because we're still trying to figure out how it shakes down, but like for running one of these clinics, we have a Supervising Attorney, we have my kind, our legal director, and any of the paralegals who is dedicated exclusively to this project which has been hugely helpful to us and was enabled by the funding from New York Community Trust and Robin Hood, and so that's our staffing of it at this point for that type of clinic.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great. And then could one of you share what the usual cost is for an asylum application, or the range? Like for anybody not receiving these services pro bono, how much money would they have to put forward for an application and a successful application?

1
2 HEATHER AXFORD: You know, what we're
3 hearing from the people that we talk to, you know,
4 that we do consultations with is-- I mean, for I589
5 it's thousands and thousands of dollars. It's
6 really-- it's really kind of-- so it's beyond what
7 people can even imagine coming up with, especially as
8 recently arrived family.

9 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And then our folks
10 here, did you have anything to add onto that or just
11 generally around challenges you're experiencing as
12 particularly around the legal services piece, because
13 that seems to have been a repetitive priority raised
14 even by MOIA and what we're hearing from, of course,
15 asylum seekers.

16 MARK VALINOTI: Yes, very briefly. MOIA
17 has indicated to providers as well as to the
18 Committee today a sort of pivot to expanding pro se
19 services, which I think what Terry and Heather
20 described is great, and that is filling a role. The
21 concern on the ground for those of us who provide
22 direct services, which I think would be acknowledged
23 by the other members of this panel is that providing
24 pro se assistance can only go so far with certain
25 cases. It's great to get people emergency

1 authorization, and it really helps and it's very
2 necessary, but asylum cases are very complex.
3 Moreover, a lot of people who would take advantage of
4 this, they may not-- you know, not to condescend, but
5 it would be very difficult to try-- for them to try
6 their own case after the application is filed. So
7 that is a concern with the expansion to more pro se
8 services.
9

10 NEVIEN SWAILMYEEN: NYLPI does not
11 participate in pro se, but with the asylum-seekers
12 that we support or particularly, non-binary, gender
13 non-conforming, Trans, HIV-positive, it's really
14 important to have community resources that we could
15 utilize to help support our clients. Similar to the
16 concerns that were named, we also find it really
17 important that our clients get resources to be aware
18 of what this process looks like. They come to us
19 completely confused, have no idea and find out about
20 us by chance, or sometimes because a partner
21 communicates that we can do direct services. Pro se
22 clinics can be helpful and at the same time, we have
23 clients who come to us with really complicated cases
24 that need support. So this would be a community
25 building effort all around.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you for that,
and of course, lifting up the queer, trans, GNC
communities as well who are often getting ignored
within the larger conversation about asylum-seekers.
Thank you all so much for your incredible work.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Again, panel three,
Theodore Moore, Aracelis Lucero, and Lisha Luo Cai,
and Theodore, you can begin when the Sergeant calls
time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

THEODORE MOORE: right. Good afternoon.
Just want to jump in. First and foremost, I think we
need to, you know, protect adult literacy
programming. The Mayor's Preliminary Budget is
proposing cuts of over 55 percent, 10 million dollars
into city-funded DYCD-contracted community-based
adult literacy programs which will result in a loss
of seats and opportunities for approximately 10,000
adults. So, over 2.2 million adult New Yorkers need
basic education, English language and high school
equivalency classes, with fewer than four percent of
those adults currently being served. Obviously, with
nearly 50,000 largely non-English-speaking asylum-
seekers arriving in New York City since last spring.

The need for adult literacy programming is higher than ever. So we hope that the Council will restore, renew, and baseline, and support the baselining of the entire 20.4 million in DYCD-contracted adult literacy programming. Did want to talk quickly about language access. So for a few years now, ourselves, MASA, Asian-American Federation and African communities together have been working towards creating three language co-ops and a community interpreter bank, and we are happy to be launching all of those things this year and hope that the Council will continue to support that through funding by re-upping on the five million dollars for the language access co-ops and the community interpreter banks. And we really hope that this will be, you know, a real shining star for the entire city, but really an example of how we can be strategic to expand language access services across the city for other municipalities as well. I do want to quickly talk about, you know, some other programming, obviously specifically for asylum-seekers, but for immigrant New Yorkers at-large. Often seeking services means that you have to travel all around the City. You have to receive your healthcare services--

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time expired.

THEODORE MOORE: Alright.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: I promise I'll come back to you. I do have a question.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Aracelis, you can begin when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

ARACELIS LUCERO: Hi, so Aracelis Lucero from Masa. Thank you so much for having us today. Masa's a community-based organization in South Bronx. We focus on supporting recently-arrived immigrant communities and also indigenous-speaking communities. The language access services and gaps in services and quality of services has been spoken about thoroughly today. As mentioned by Theo, we are part of the Language Access Worker Cooperative group. I'm just going to talk a little bit more about our survey data that we have collected from indigenous speakers as a part of this project. We have learned that 90 percent of our indigenous-speaking respondents are interested in becoming interpreters and joining our worker co-op as an income-generating opportunity. We've also learned through survey that our members

have identified the health system, 93 percent the education system, 66 percent in the court system, 52 percent as areas with a large need for services.

While we do know that the New York City Council, the language line and interpretation in Spanish, we've heard over and over again how a lot of those interpreting language line services aren't adequate, especially when we think about the trauma experienced by recently-arrived immigrant communities and the quality of Spanish that they've received, which becomes critical for when they are retelling their stories or talking to mental health providers about trauma. In regards to education services and recently-arrived children and families, Masa believes that there is a need for more support in schools and outside of schools for children in all grade levels and making sure that they have all the resources that they need to become acclimated to the new changes.

This includes making sure that DOE is connected and coordinated with all of the services that the City is providing and making sure that they have a true plan to communicate these services to families. I will jump really quickly. Masa is a CBO that is part of the Pro Se Plus Project. I will add that a benefit

is that we are, as part of the project, trying to provide training to community advocates and supporters. I know that--

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Lisha, you can begin when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

LISHA LUO CAI: Thank you Committee Chair Hanif for holding this hearing. I'm Lisha Luo Cai, Advocacy Coordinator at the Asian American Federation. We're here to discuss the City's response and delivery of services to immigrant New Yorkers and our migrant neighbors. It's important to note that the issues our migrant neighbors face are also immigrant issues. As we enter Fiscal Year 2024, immigrants continue to face numerous challenges from years of regressive policies aimed at punishing immigrants, the continued xenophobic rhetoric related to the pandemic, and increasing anti-Asian violent crimes, and even the current migrant crisis which has highlighted the needs of all immigrant New Yorkers. As a Sanctuary City we should welcome all immigrants,

documented or undocumented, with the dignity and fairness they deserve. And despite all this, our CBOs have kept our immigrant communities taken care of, leading the way, providing numerous innovative services and programming that are both linguistically and culturally sensitive. This year's budget must prioritize support for our immigrant communities and the CBOs that have led by example in providing language accessible and culturally competent services. The urgency has never been greater for our City Council to help restore our immigrant community's trust in their government. To that end, here are recommendations: Continue to invest and sustain the language access cooperatives and community interpreter bank. The pay-off for funding these initiatives will be seen in multiple ways from providing employment opportunities in our immigrant communities to relieving restraints on existing CBO capacity to provide interpretation, to address the serious gap in quality language interpretations for the communities that need it the most, invest in immigration-related services and programming for our community that continues to contend with the ongoing backlash of anti-immigrant policies. Invest and

bridge workforce development programs that allow low-income limited English-proficient Asian immigrants to access employment opportunities in new and emerging industries, and create funding to Asian-led, Asian-serving organizations and protect existing initiatives and discretionary funding streams under the council's purview that prioritize immigrant-focused services. CBOs have led by example on how to effectively spend city dollars, and this moment presents an opportunity for City Council to show that New York City can still lead by example in protecting its most-vulnerable. We at the Asian American Federation thank you for allowing us to testify and look forward to working with all of you to make sure our immigrant communities get the support they deserve.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. Great.

So, Theo, could you tell us a little bit more about the work you all have been doing to launch the language cooperatives? That's really good news. And if the money that was allocated to get this going is the same request for this Fiscal Year?

THEODORE MOORE: Yes, so it's the same request as last year mostly due the fact that even

though the organizations have been working since the budget passed last June, the money hasn't actually been received by DYCD and allocated to the organizations. So, NYC Masa, Asian American Federation, and African Communities Together have been working, you know, for the entire year without actually receiving any funding. So, we've been going along planning and launching the co-ops with African Communities Together actually having multiple trainings. I think they've been averaging a training per week. So by the end of the Fiscal Year, they would have had at least 52 trainings to get individuals recruited and into the co-ops with similar things planned for both Masa and Asian American Federation to actually start doing some of the adult literacy and the adult education and research necessary to start giving their members of their communities up to speed so that they can join their respective co-ops. On the interpreter bank side, we're currently in the process of actually launching the interpreter bank by hiring an Executive Director. We just received the okay to be the fiscal sponsor for that, so we'll be staffing up, and then we're going to be creating an entire training

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Okay, got it. And then could you-- and then I'd like to hear from Aracelis as well, describe why it's important that we orient our city's language access protocol toward a worker cooperative model? Why is it so essential to be fighting for worker cooperatives for language access? Theo, if you'd like to start us off.

THEODORE MOORE: Sure. One is because we think with a worker cooperative model that we can actually pay [sic] the individuals within the co-op more than telephonic services like Language Line actually offer their people who provide translation and interpretation. So not only would we charge the City and other entity that wants the contract with the co-ops or with the interpreter bank less, but we'd actually pay the service providers more.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. And Aracelis, I know you were talking about and lifting up indigenous languages. Could you tell us a little bit more about what the survey revealed about indigenous languages and why it's so critical to ensure that they are part of the work around worker cooperatives, but also the language access positions available in our city?

ARACELIS LUCERO: Great. Thank you so much. So, in general, we know for a long time that immigrant communities have a lot to offer, language being one of the critical assets that we should all be leveraging. For our particular community, we have a large undocumented community. We also have community members that are going to need more support. There's a bit of variation between the language groups. So, in the indigenous languages, for example, English might not be somewhere where there's a large proficient population, and so from Masa's perspective, the worker co-op model and incubating it really is around providing the necessary supports to build the pipeline and to provide them with the workforce development opportunities to build this important asset and skill. From the survey, we hear over and over again feelings of discrimination. A lot of people may not be really proficient in Spanish even, and so for many different reasons, being able to have access to an interpreter in-person is really important. I know that Language Line has been used, even for the indigenous languages, but for this community, culturally-wise it's not always the most adequate.

1
2 Also, just translating of materials, not all of these
3 languages are languages that people know how to write
4 or read, and so this is just part of the many
5 conversations that we had over the years about
6 different communities requiring different solutions,
7 and the worker cooperative model was the best model
8 for us, and we've been working on it for a very long
9 time to make sure that we're building the correct
10 scaffolding to support the successful certification
11 and training for indigenous interpreters. I would
12 also like to note that we're already working with an
13 organization called Co Libre [sp?]. they're a
14 collective on [speaking Spanish], and there's people
15 that have already been engaged in this work, so I
16 think that it's really, really important to continue
17 to lift up those voices, and also there's precedent
18 for this through that group as well who are already
19 providing language services in indigenous languages
20 that we should be, you know, also learning from.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you for that.

22 And then you mentioned that you're one of the
23 participating organizations in the Pro Se Plus
24 Project. Could you share what the experience has
25

ARACELIS LUCERO: I think I would echo everything that Terry and Heather said. From our perspective, we are a CBO that a long time ago decided not to build out a legal service provider arm just because we recognize that we already had many partners that were doing this work and were doing it well, and so we've remained a CBO partner to many of the legal service providers, and for us, we've seen the importance of being able to train up community advocates, who from what we've heard were part of larger DOH initiatives and in other groups that aren't really used to servicing immigrants or navigating this, and so for me I think a highlight is being able to support people are interested in learning who don't know what this may look like, and not for them to become experts, but you know, it's important when an immigrant, you know, has an issue and there's someone at least knowledgeable to know what to say or not to say or to be like more informed. So I think that would be the benefit. I think, you know, obviously we would want all the money in the world to pay legal service providers to

provide one-to-one representation. I think that this was really an initiative that was born out of noticing a need and a response to be created, and so I also want to say that flexibility has been something that comes over and over again when we have this conversations. The flexibility to innovate, the flexibility to be able to pivot and to respond, and so you know, I just think that the City Council should continue to support pilot projects and try new ways to support and meet the needs of immigrant New Yorkers.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much.
That's all for this panel.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: The next panel will be Mario Russell, Yesenya Mata [sp?], Daisy Flores, and Rex Chen. Mario, you can begin when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

MARIO RUSSELL: Hi, good afternoon. It's a pleasure to be here and thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'll be really brief and I'll really speak about Catholic Charities immigrant refugee services work in four areas. I won't go into any detail about our work on the legal side. I think

you've heard quite a bit about it, especially the work of the community as a collective around HRI, of course what we've been doing, ACT NYC [sic] and some of our work at the courts. But I just really want to speak about our day labor programs, our ESOL, ICare [sic], and refugee resettlement. Day labor programming really is critical to see the city's continued and enhanced resources and resourcing which would help Catholic Charities with other members of the Day Labor Workforce Initiative to respond to what is really an increasing demand which we're seeing with influx. Ongoing investment in Site Safety Training Program will further improve job development outcomes and expand language access for training. On the ESOL and digital literacy side, and I would include Adult literacy, of course. As this Council examines its Preliminary and then eventually Executive Budgets, we request really four particular areas of attention. One is renewal of the four million dollars council discretionary Adult Literacy Initiative. Two, doubling the funding of the resoundingly successful Adult Literacy Initiative-- excuse me, Adult Literacy Pilot Project. Third, restoration and renewal of 13.7 million in the

baseline Adult Literacy funding, and fourth, the baselining of 6.7 million one year, the FY23 investment in Adult Literacy funding. This would keep existing programs whole while allowing upcoming contracts to reflect per-student rates that reflect the cost of services. On the unaccompanied minor side, really the ICARE program-- should expect you'll be hearing a little bit about that later as well. Just a reminder that as really we see a continued increase and, you know, resettlement of people from the border, the need for legal services on the--

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time expired.

MARIO RUSSELL: [inaudible]

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much, Mario.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yesenia, you can begin when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

ABIGAIL DORCIN: I want to say thank you to the Chairman of the Immigration Committee, Shahana Hanif, and to the rest of the Council Members for allowing La Colmena to testify today. Today, I will be testifying on behalf of the Executive Director

1 Yesenia Mata. My name is Abigail Dorcin. I am the
2 Organizing Coordinator of La Colmena and immigrant
3 and workers' rights organization based on Staten
4 Island, and also formed part of the Day Laborer
5 Coalition. Now, being part of-- being an immigrant
6 rights center in Staten Island is not easy due to
7 anti-immigrant sentiment that comes out of Staten
8 Island. However, despite those challenges, we
9 continue being in the forefront. We have been in the
10 forefront of the City of New York in supporting
11 asylum-seekers. Currently, we are a satellite [sic]
12 [inaudible] the city and have been added to the
13 Welcome NYC initiative, so we continue doing our
14 work. Our center sees hundreds of people every week
15 from different types of background and ethnicities
16 because of services that we provide. We have two
17 centers in areas that are very diverse and that need
18 much support. These are also the areas where the
19 black and Latino communities were dying at higher
20 rate during the pandemic and La Colmena was able to
21 provide a lot of support. This is why [inaudible]
22 this year as every year. It is important for La
23 Colmena to continue being supported, because if La
24 Colmena disappears in Staten Island, so do the many
25

services that the immigrants receive. We understand that La Colmena is loud [sic] and of the work that we are doing in Staten Island, and because of that it makes many uncomfortable, but we will continue doing so because for a long time the immigrant community was forgotten and now we are showing that we are here and because of that we keep growing. This is why we're looking into opening our third--

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Daisy, you can begin when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

DAISY FLORES: Good afternoon and thank you to the Immigration Committee. My name is Daisy Flores and I'm the Civil Rights Immigration Lead Organizer at Make the Road New York. With a membership of 25,000, Make the Road New York has been serving New York's community of color and immigrant working class families for 25 years. We provide health, legal, application, youth services, plus community organizing, [inaudible] education, policy innovation. Thank you Chairman-- woman Hanif and

Council Members for securing vital funding for our services last year. [inaudible] support newly-arriving asylum-seekers with over 1,700 cell phones so far, plus metro cards, youth supports, and ongoing information sessions with hot meals at our community centers. Make the Road's key budget request this Fiscal Year 2024 include the following allocations, \$200K for Make the Road under the Speaker's initiative around health, legal, adult literacy, and youth services reaching over 15,000 individuals; \$275K for Make the Road under the Low-wage Workers Work Initiative, and \$3 million for the initiative overall; renew the \$4 million Adult Literacy Initiative with [inaudible] student, and allocate \$100K to Make the Road to provide English, citizenship and career training classes, as is truly needed; renew and expand the Adult Literacy Pilot Project to \$5 million and [inaudible] \$100K to Make the Road for [inaudible] services; restore and baseline \$20.4 million for DYCD Adult Literacy Program; \$30K for Make the Road under the Digital Inclusion Literacy Initiative where we provide technology and instruction; \$100K under the Access Health Initiative and \$80K under the Immigrant Health

Initiative to help reach [inaudible] and improve access to care; \$70K under the NCCAP initiative; and \$2.3 million for NCCAP overall to help immigrant New Yorkers navigate the health system; continue funding for CBOs like [inaudible] community health workers who then work with city hospitals. In addition, we ask that the Council and the Mayor submit a comment on the state's 1332 waiver request--

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Rex, you can begin when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

REX CHEN: Hello, my name is Rex Chen, pronouns he/him. I'm the Immigration Director at Legal Services NYC. I'm going to cover three points. First, we do a large number of immigration cases every year. Over 25,000 people lived in the households that received our immigration help in 2020. And also it's a wide range of immigration services, including many time consuming immigration court cases. You know, immigration court cases are much more complex and item consuming than they were

just a few years ago. My second point is that Legal Services NYC offers more than just immigration help. Our social workers and co-workers help with education enrollment, housing issues, and other non-immigration issues. Two of our social workers ran a support group for some young clients and discussed with them the pressure that they feel to get a job and how they've very vulnerable to child labor exploitation. Many of them are too afraid to file a labor complaint with the authorities. Increased social work support is very important, especially because of all the trauma immigrants have after the pandemic. And then my third point is that we've also been working on many ambitious projects to try to address much larger immigration issues. For example in 2020, we sued the New York City Immigration Court about its COVID policies. Very recently in December 2022, our Justice Learning Center gave a webinar to help teach people about asylum claims for Venezuelans, and about 200 lawyers around the country attended it, and we gave it with lots of help from Terry Lawson's wonderful nonprofit UnLocal. Also, recently in December, we created a tip sheet for defending immigrants under last year's very harsh asylum

processing rule that the government's ramping up and over 130 people around the country asked for a copy. And finally, we are now working on a toolkit to address anti-black bias and unconscious bias by immigration judges. We plan to share that across the country when it's ready. Thank you very much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. We will now move to the next panel. Ira Yankwitt, Jeffrey Lau, Kom Toppa [sp?], Andy Marte [sp?], and Filmarie Quiones [sp?]. Ira, you can begin.

IRA YANKWITT: Great. Thank you, Chair Hanif, for the opportunity to testify. My name is Ira Yankwitt, and I'm the Executive Director of the Literacy Assistance Center and a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy. Mayor Adams has proposed devastating cuts to adult literacy education, cuts that would bring funding to its lowest level since 2016 and which would eliminate seats and opportunities for approximately 10,000 students. As you know, there are more than 2.2 million adults in New York City with limited English language proficiency or who don't have a high school diploma. Yet, combined city and state funding is so low that fewer than four percent of these adults are

able to access adult basic education, high school equivalency or English for speakers of other languages classes at any given year. Moreover, over the past year approximately 50,000 asylum-seekers and refugees have arrived in New York after fleeing life-threatening social, political, environmental, and economic conditions in their home countries, conditions that in many cases have been shaped by US foreign policy. But rather than committing to bolster the resources and critical services that all of our communities deserve, the Mayor has proposed unconscionable budget cuts to crucial programs including adult literacy education. In response, the Literacy Assistance Center and the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy call on the City to first restore and baseline 20.4 million dollars in funding for DYCD RFP-contracted adult literacy programs. Restored and baseline funding should be used both to keep programs whole and to invest in greater resources, services and supports for students. Second, renew the four million dollars City Council discretionary adult literacy initiative with added flexibility so that programs that receive this funding are not bound by the problematically low

1
2 \$950 dollar per student DYCD funding rate. Third,
3 renew the \$2.5 million dollar discretionary Adult
4 Literacy Pilot Project and expand it to \$5 million
5 dollars under the new title, Adult Literacy Program
6 Enhancement, now that the pilot has proven to be a
7 resounding success. Adult literacy education is an
8 immigrant rights issue, a feminist issue, and an
9 essential piece of the boarder movement for racial,
10 social, and economic justice. Care not cuts. Thank
11 you.

12 JEFFREY LAU: Thank you, Chair Hanif, for
13 this opportunity to testify today. Thank you,
14 Committee on Immigration. My name is Jeffrey Lau.
15 I'm the Program Director of the Adult Literacy
16 Program at the Chinese American Planning Council.
17 CPC is the largest Asian American social services
18 organization in the United States providing vital
19 resources to more than 280,000 people just last year
20 through more than 50 programs and over 30 sites
21 across Manhattan, Brooklyn and Queens. At CPC adult
22 literacy means so much more than just learning
23 English. In our classes students learn English to
24 help with their children's education, navigate the
25 healthcare system, find meaningful work, and become a

US citizen. Through classroom presentations guest speakers come in to educate students about their American rights, housing rights, financial literacy, health and healthcare, how to start a small business. It is also in adult literacy programs where our community members learn about the critical services that are available to them throughout the City. Through wrap-around services and follow-ups, students learn about childcare, childcare services, senior services, legal services, insurance, housing, college access, food assistance, workforce training programs and more. English literacy classes means equipping our communities to be empowered. It means learning how to build a community and thrive in New York City. It means uplifting our voices so that we can be heard and represented. Supporting adult literacy classes is critical to continue this effort. I reiterate everything that my colleagues have said today. we ask the City to restore and baseline 20.4 million dollars in funding for DYCD RFP-contracted adult literacy programs, renew the \$4 million dollars City Council discretionary Adult Literacy Initiative with added flexibility and renew the \$2.5 million City Council discretionary Adult Literacy Pilot Project

and expand it to \$5 million dollars under the new title of Adult Literacy Program Enhancement. If we're serious about providing our community members with meaningful education that will empower them to succeed in New York City, we need to invest in adult literacy programs. Thank you.

KOM TOPPA: Good afternoon everyone. I'm Kom Toppa from Woodside [sic] Queens, father of two boys, husband, and a driver for [inaudible] Car Service. Education is important to everyone. When it comes to the adult literacy, even more necessary when it's trying to provide in the new place and new culture, new system. It is simple, as the-- to help the kids for their homework. I remember when my son come [inaudible] back, I was trying to help him, the homework, but I'm also thinking that I wanted to help him as a parallel [sic] how the school teaching, but that's also need some education. I'm trying to change my career now. I'm taking classes at the City Tech College Brooklyn. Right now, I pass the three subject. I have one more to go, and I'm also very happy to have the teacher, Ms. Carol Cassen [sp?] and Eric Appleton [sp?], help with that. We are a running a math history group with three other friend

1 where we help other student who is struggling in the
2 math. And literacy-- literacy will help lift
3 themselves out of the poverty, make sustainable job
4 which will change their lives. Thank you.

5
6 ANDY MARTE: Good afternoon, Chair, and
7 thank you for this opportunity to speak. Good
8 afternoon to the esteemed members of the New York
9 City Council Committee on Immigration. My name is
10 Andy Marte, and I am a counselor at the RiseBoro
11 Community Partnership Education Department. As a
12 Christian, the son of immigrants, and the brother of
13 men who turned to the streets, I am a firm believer
14 in America being the land of redemption. In the
15 1960s Martin Luther King reminded a divided nation
16 that the fierce urgency of now. As we seek to reform
17 our policing as we have tens of thousands of new New
18 Yorkers, and as we seek a system of restorative
19 justice, the time is now to increase funding for the
20 adult literacy programs and supportive services that
21 will enhance learning and provide New Yorkers a
22 second chance. Our past doesn't have to define our
23 circumstances, or the words uttered by an African-
24 American musical director at a Catholic church in
25 Bedford-Stuyvesant last night, as he called all in

attendance to dig deep and aim to make our world a better place. Are we ready to put politics aside and use this moment to show the world why we all got involved in public service? Over the past few weeks I have seen adult learners at our Bushwick center practicing their English skills in groups, individually and through their counseling sessions. They give me hope that our country will continue to be a beacon of hope. However, when they learned that this program may be cut, they became a bit disenchanted. Showing grit, the students quickly organized and requested their input into this process. Students in our HSC, ABE, and ESOL programs of all different backgrounds all wanted their voice to be heard so that New York can hear them. Let's give them that second chance. I ask that you restore the \$20.4 million dollars of adult literacy programs, that you renew the discretionary Adult Literacy Initiative and increase the \$2.5 million City Council discretionary Adult literacy Pilot Project to \$5 million under the new title, Adult Literacy Program Enhancement. These increases will allow us to provide comprehensive services like digital literacy, resume and cover letter courses, workforce etiquette

and ultimately refer them to immigration healthcare and other services that they may require. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

FILMARIE QUIONES: Good afternoon. Dear New York City Council Committee on Immigration, my name is Filmarie Quiones [inaudible] I have been an ESOL teacher at RiseBoro Community Partnership for nine years, and I have witnessed the importance of literacy programs for adult immigrants in New York City. As an educator who works with adult English language learners, I have seen firsthand the impact that these programs have on the lives of immigrants in our community. My students come from all over the world and are eager to learn English so they can better integrate into United States society. They are willing to make significant sacrifices including working multiple jobs, missing time with their families to attend classes and improve their language skills. The perseverance and education my students show in their pursuit of learning a new language is commendable. They understand that being able to speak and understand English is crucial for them to succeed in this country and they are committed to achieving their goals. By funding literacy programs

1 for adult immigrants you will be providing critical
2 support to this vulnerable population. These
3 programs provide students with the necessary tools to
4 communicate effectively, obtain employment, and
5 navigate complex systems such as healthcare and
6 government services. Furthermore, investing in
7 literacy programs for adult immigrants in line with
8 New York City's values, New York City has always been
9 a place of diversity and inclusion, and supporting
10 immigrants who wants to improve themselves and
11 contribute to our society is the right thing to do.
12 Doing so will help ensure our community remains
13 vibrant, inclusive, and prosperous. In conclusion, I
14 strongly urge you to restore and baseline 20.4million
15 dollars in funding for DYCD, RFP-contracted adult
16 literacy programs to keep existing literacy services
17 whole. Moreover, our education would be enhanced if
18 we could benefit from the renewal of the \$4 million
19 dollars City Council-- Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. So, I'd
22 like to learn a little bit more about-- I know that
23 many of you have offered adult literacy programming
24 over Zoom. Could you just share what the challenge
25 have been with the Administration? Because I know

DYCD doesn't approve of this, or there's some hurdles involved. Could you tell me more about that?

JEFFREY LAU: Yeah, I could talk a little bit about this. At CPC, we-- alright, so, I guess you could answer it this way. We do offer online classes, but it's not through DYCD. We do have some flexibility from other contracts, and what we've seen is it does provide-- having online classes provides flexibility to those who might have to take care of a small child at home, who might have mobility challenges. It-- for folks who might not necessarily work a 9:00 to 5:00, right, and they're afforded more flexible hours. A challenge that we're having with the Administration is they don't provide this. We don't have that much flexibility to offer online classes, even though there is a demand for it. So what often happens is we have students waiting to see when their seat is next. So they can access these critical resources. That's a particular challenge. A new challenge we're facing right now is we're starting to see folks who might not necessarily be housing stable, right, for folks who might be living in shelters, for folks who are asylum-seekers who might be moving around. If we have a physical place

1 where students must attend every day in order for us
2 to provide those services, it becomes a little less
3 flexible. Having an online class, having remote
4 options, this would provide more opportunities to
5 folks who really do need these services. I think
6 that answers your question.

8 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: It does. I'd like to
9 know at present how many courses does your
10 organization provide? How many educators do you
11 have? And then per class, how many students? And
12 then are they-- are they just like elementary,
13 intermediate? Like, could you walk me through kind
14 of, like, the discrepancies or the courses offered?

15 JEFFREY LAU: So, it's a lot. Alright, so
16 through DYCD, through our contracted DYCD classes
17 that are all in-person-- six-- I'm just counting them
18 in my head right now. So in total we have 42 classes
19 that we offer. Only 12 classes are online yearly.
20 Twelve classes are online yearly. Through DYCD--
21 sorry, I'm just doing math in my head right now. I'm
22 an English teacher. I work with English. It's about
23 20. Don't quote me on this. I can give you exact
24 numbers. And the rest are hybrid classes. Alright?
25 So, each class is about-- we have about 25 students

1 per class, so you can estimate it that way. We also
2 provide through these-- through this program we're
3 providing-- with DYCD, it's full in-person, and with
4 other contracts outside of this city, it's hybrid
5 and/or remote. So, what we-- I think that's
6 answering your question of what that looks like. Oh,
7 for the levels, we offer all levels. Anywhere
8 between-- like, really at beginner level where folks
9 are learning ABC's, 1-2-3's. They're learning basic
10 vocabulary, how to answer self-identifying questions,
11 how to fill out basic forms. From there all the way
12 up to folks who are studying to enter post-secondary
13 education, folks who are ready to enter the
14 workforce, and it goes up the levels. We break it
15 down by six levels, and we-- and students all fall
16 within that range.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great. And then I
19 had a follow-up that I have now forgotten. Had DYCD
20 shared why they don't want providers to do any remote
21 programming when we heard from MOIA that their We
22 Speak NYC program is hybrid, that the admin itself
23 has initiatives that they're leading in remote ways.
24 Would like to know just what they've offered as like,
25 why not?

1
2 REX CHEN: It-- since the beginning of
3 the Adams' Administration, DYCD has really been
4 following suit of the Mayor. And so to the extent
5 that the Mayor was so focused on bringing workers
6 back into in-person work, agencies back into in-
7 person work, other systems and institutions within
8 the City back into in-person, so too did they call on
9 the DYCD adult literacy programs to come back to in-
10 person. As the Mayor has become a bit more flexible
11 or has been reconsidering some of that policy, DYCD
12 so too has become a bit more flexible. So it's a
13 moving target with DYCD relative, I think, to broader
14 Mayoral and Administration policy.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great. Oh, and then
16 If you could just talk to me a little bit about the
17 adult literacy educator pipeline. Would love to
18 learn how are we supporting the educators? Are they
19 coming from our communities? One innovation that
20 we've been able to do with the Fifth Avenue Committee
21 in my district is really lean on Bangladeshi women
22 who are bilingual and really bring them into the
23 programming and shadow the current educators, and
24 then with the hope that they too one day will leading
25

these programs. I would love to learn a little bit more about the educator pipeline here.

REX CHEN: So, when I started in adult literacy education in the 1990s, most adult literacy educators, both teachers, program managers looked like me. And thankfully, particularly in the last decade I think we've seen dramatic turnover as people have retired, and more and more both teachers, program directors, program managers, leaders of adult literacy education are coming from or have deep ties to the communities that they're working in. And yes, I think the initiative that-- with the Fifth Avenue Committee and the Bangladeshi's [inaudible] club, really speaks to our vision of what we are trying to move to as a field. In terms of the pipeline, we at the Literacy Assistance Center are very fortunate to have been contracted by DYCD to provide professional development technical assistance over the last number of years, and so there are a variety of everything from single workshops to full year-long courses for both training those who are already in the field as well as those who are interested in entering the field, particularly those who are interested in

entering the field to teach English language in immigrant classrooms.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And is the funding that you all are advocating for reflect the need for educator retention or like the professional development and the skill training portions?

REX CHEN: So, there are really two issues when it comes to adult literacy funding. One, that the total level of funding is so low that we're only serving three to four percent of the need, but the other issue is that the amount of investment per student is so low that often programs and organizations don't have the resources that they need to provide students with the supports and services that they deserve. It also means that they don't have the resources to provide teachers with full-time jobs, full-time jobs with benefits, provide time for professional development opportunities. So, you know, our calls over the years have always been two-fold. One to increase the level of funding so that we can serve more students, but also to invest-- to provide greater funding to invest more per student so that the programs have those resources, and we are very grateful as a field to the City Council for the

pilot project, because that's exactly what the pilot project did. It gave an additional on average \$650 per student over the \$950 per student City Council funding rate, and as you've seen from the report on just the first six months, the results have been extraordinary in terms of the outcomes and impacts for students, their families, and the communities.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Excellent. Thank you so much. Appreciate you all, and especially for staying here all day and in-person. Greatly appreciated.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: The next panel will be Mohamed Attia, Lana Cohen, and Joann Kim.

MOHAMED ATTIA: Good afternoon, Chair Hanif. My name is Mohamed Attia. I'm the Managing Director of Street Vendor Project at the Urban Justice Center, a membership based organization that champions rights of street vendors and small businesses to contribute to the life and culture of New York City. Today, nearly 20,000 entrepreneurs, primarily immigrants, people of color, military veterans, and women are employed as street vendors in New York City. Vendors come from some of the most marginalized communities, specifically communities of

1 color and low-income households. Most vendors are
2 new immigrants who rely on vending to provide for
3 themselves and their families. As the only
4 organizations that serves street vendors in New York
5 City, SVP is the centralized hub for this underserved
6 population on providing critical services to street
7 vendors since 2001. SVP requests support from the
8 New York City Council to sustain and expand our
9 community outreach and education program for street
10 vendors in all five boroughs. Through this program
11 SVP conducts multilingual outreach in a range of
12 formats to street vendors to educate them on the
13 rules and regulations of vending, teaching them their
14 legal rights and responsibilities and connect them to
15 a variety of resources ranging from public health to
16 immigration. SVP's model of engagement prioritizes
17 meeting street vendors where it's convenient to them
18 on the street, sidewalks, garage storages, and other
19 places that accommodating their schedule of the small
20 business owners. Our organization is successful in
21 reaching this unique community due to the sense [sic]
22 of language and culturally-specific capacity of our
23 staff. We conduct outreach and disseminate
24 educational materials in Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin,
25

LENA COHEN: Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Lena Cohen. I am a senior policist-- policy analyst at United Neighborhood Houses. We are the umbrella organization of 45 settlement houses across New York State. There are two points I really just want to address today with you all. The first is on the Adult Literacy Education Program, and I want to highlight a bunch of elements of my colleague's former testimonies around our budget asks to restore and baseline \$20.4 million dollars in total funding to support the adult literacy education program, and that's really because these adult literacy learners need classes to continue uninterrupted so that they can keep learning how to defend their rights, how to

1 navigate different education and public health
2 systems, how to support their children who are now
3 enrolled in K-12 schools and whatnot. However, city
4 funding goes through several different budget lines,
5 and when you look at the Mayor's Preliminary Budget
6 and then compare those numbers with the most recent
7 November budget modification, it's kind of unclear
8 how much funding the City actually allots to adult
9 literacy. But the bottom line that I want to point
10 out is the administration really shouldn't be playing
11 these budget games with the adult literacy program or
12 its students or teachers that depend on it. And
13 that's why, again, uplifting what my colleagues have
14 already said, UNH urges the Mayor in particular to
15 restore and baseline all one-time funds from this
16 school year 23 and reverse the PEG to adult literacy,
17 because it's unfair to penalizes these programs for
18 programmatic underspending, especially at a time when
19 more students than ever need these classes. And
20 lastly, the second point I want to call out is our
21 extreme support and excitement about the Promise NYC
22 program. We're hoping to see this program restored
23 and expand it to \$20 million dollars in Fiscal Year
24
25

24. For lots of reasons, I could chat about more.
Thank you so much.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Next is Joann.

Joann, you can begin when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

JOANN KIM: Hi, I am Joann Kim, a
community outreach and volunteer program manager at
the Korean-American Family Service Center. I would
like to thank Chairperson Hanif and the members of
the Committee on Immigration for the opportunity to
testify today and for your ongoing support for the
Korean-American Family Service Center. Since its
inception in 1989, the Korean-American Family Service
Center, KFSC, has committed to preventing and ending
domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse.
All our services are provided in a culturally-
competent and linguistically-appropriate setting, and
as a direct service organization, serving the
vulnerable immigrant community we are an essential
human service provider that cannot cease operating.
KFSC has been at the forefront of serving those
affected by domestic and gender-based violence and
the anti-Asian hate crimes and the mental health
well-being of our AAPI community members. KFSC's

frontline staff responded to increased calls to the only 24-hour hotline, bilingual Korean-English hotline on the East Coast. In 2022, KFSC received 4,958 hotline calls of which 92 percent were related to domestic violence and sexual assault, child abuse, and/or trafficking. Ninety-five percent of those callers were Asian-American, 98 percent were women, 100 percent were immigrants, and 98 percent had limited proficiency in English. Each year, over 3,000 individuals benefit from one or more services and the majority of them are from Queens. The demand for our services across the organization has increased to--

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much.

JOANN KIM: Oh, sorry. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Yes, I have a question. Mohamed, thank you so much for being here. Could you share if there is anything that MOIA offers? Do you coordinate with MOIA?

MOHAMED ATTIA: In terms of like our efforts to the education and outreach, no. We reach

1 out sometimes if there is a question about translated
2 material etcetera, but that is very rare.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And what's the most
5 pressing issue right now for street vendors in terms
6 of the-- any sort of agency that is working to
7 undermine or harassing street vendors?

8 MOHAMED ATTIA: Yeah, one of the main
9 challenges we are seeing with the agencies over the
10 last several years is that we are seeing the city
11 government investing in one aspect only when it gets
12 to street vending, which is enforcement, fining, and
13 ticketing, and sometimes even arresting the vendors,
14 but there is little to no effort or resources to
15 educate the vendors on the vending rules and
16 regulations and how to comply with them. Especially a
17 lot of the vendors who are unlicensed didn't know how
18 to even comply with the siting [sic] rules and
19 regulations, let alone understand them and be in
20 compliance with them in real life. And street
21 vending rules are very complicated. DCWP offers the
22 administrative code in English and it's kind of like
23 a 50-page book that is very, very difficult to
24 understand. If someone is eligible to receive a
25 general vendor license, and it's super difficult to

really understand that text in English, let alone if you are foreign-born person and English is not your first language it gets to be even more complicated.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And I see here from your stats that 95 percent of street vendors are immigrants.

MOHAMED ATTIA: That's true, according to a survey we conducted with 2,100 members of our-- members in SVP back in 2021, 95 percent of them were foreign-born.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And in addition to the challenges of such as precarious workplace, given that they are prone to harassment and ticketing and criminalization, what are some of the other challenges that they're experiencing in our city?

MOHAMED ATTIA: Well, one of the main challenges is how the system is set up to begin with. The system was created back in the 70s and 80s that prevents vendors from formalizing the businesses and getting into the system, accessing the license and permit to be considered a legal business, and that gets to the lack of acknowledgement of them as small business owners, legitimate business owners. Then when we go to how the city agencies create a lot of

resources for other types of small businesses, we see little to no support offered to the vendors, let alone the fact that people are out there in the street. It's super challenging to run a business in the street, being out there 10, 12 hours every day trying to run your business, trying to be compliant, and trying to make money, dealing with the weather, dealing with enforcement agencies, dealing with all the variable factors that you have to deal with every single day that makes street vending a super vulnerable business and job for a lot of people. But also, it's very convenient for a lot, and it's very supportive to a lot of people who cannot just get a normal job, 9:00 to 5:00, mainly for immigrants who have limited English capacity. Also, very limited-- also, like very accommodating to a lot of people who have limited time capacity, specially single mothers who have a lot of family responsibilities and childcare to look after.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Absolutely. And then the other stat here is that there are an estimated 20,000 street vendors in our city. Do you know if this is an-- if we've seen an increase of vendors, or have we seen a decrease as a result of the harassment

and ticketing? Could you elaborate more on the trends we're seeing with our micro-businesses?

MOHAMED ATTIA: Sure. So the trend during the pandemic, we have seen a lot of fluctuation in the number. So starting with the very beginning of the pandemic, a lot of people stopped vending and 'til now they haven't recovered since the pandemic started. A lot of people stopped vending, but on the other hand, we've seen in so many neighborhoods across the City a lot of people started vending during the pandemic, because they lost their businesses, they lost their storefronts. They lost their jobs as employees, and they found street vending to be the only option for them to help them, like, stay afloat and get back on their feet, and it really varies from one place to the other. But we do know that when it gets to the interest of vendors and want to access licenses, we do have almost a 12,000 name waiting list on the DCWP waiting to get one of the general vendor licenses. So we do have 12,000 people waiting for a merchandise vendor license. We also have more than 10,000 names on the wait list for food vending permit that was created by Intro 1116 that passed two years ago, and the legislation only

offers 4,000 permits while we have 10,000 people or more waiting for one of those 4,000 permits that the Health Department has yet to issue.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: And then finally, as you're crafting policy ideas to really create a city that is inclusive of our micro businesses, our street vendors, are you looking to other cities as models? Are there cities where municipalities have prioritized the needs of street vendors and have created an urban infrastructure that is inclusive of these businesses? Could you elaborate if there is a model, and if not, are we the sort of the hub, the center, where this creativity and innovation could be possible?

MOHAMED ATTIA: Sure. In a way, New York City is very unique when it gets to the history of street vending, because street vendors have existed here for centuries, maybe since the inception of the City, and a lot of cities and a lot of states in the nation are looking to New York and how New York is doing things. However, we have seen on the west coast the state of California de-criminalize street vending across the state when back before 2018 they didn't have a street vending system on the sidewalks,

and they just created that with no limits on the number of permits and licenses, and the state law requires all localities to create a system with no limits or no caps on the number of permits and licenses to ensure all the vendors have pathway to formalize the businesses.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Great. Thank you so much. That's all for this panel.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: The next panel will be Karen Simmons, Alexandra Rizzio [sp?], and Sierra Kraft [sp?].

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: You can begin. Please turn on the mic.

KAREN SIMMONS: Good afternoon or good evening. Thank you Chair Hanif and thank you everyone here. My name is Karen Simmons. I am the Executive Director of the Children's Law Center, and it's been a joy and a privilege just to watch this process in motion. It's my first time here. I am leading an organization that is 25 years old, a not-for-profit that represents-- has represented over 130,000 children in legal proceedings in New York City Family Court and the New York State Supreme Court and the Integrated Domestic Violence Courts.

On each of our cases the Children's Law Center is assigned, we strive to give our clients effective voice in a legal proceeding that has a critical impact on their lives. And I want to thank you for giving us the opportunity to testify, because the voice of the child is not usually heard in this type of proceeding. I have submitted lengthier written testimony, but want to highlight here CLC's experience representing children and young people under the age of 21 who are seeking special immigrant juvenile status. We call it SIJ. These children are young people facing desperate situations that prevent them from returning to their homeland. I am sure you're all familiar with the stories young people from all over the globe who face violence, political unrest, poverty, potential trafficking, and have braved the unbelievable journey just to make it here. On top of that, they do not have a parent or a parent in their homeland whom they can return. They and a caretaker in New York City come to Family Court with the hope of obtaining an order that is crucial and necessary for first step towards achieving lawful immigration status in this country. I include several client stories in our written testimony, and

our Queens office in particular. We're in every borough except for Manhattan. Are assigned to represent these young people in Family Court portion of the case before it goes to Federal Court. And each client story is compelling and heart breaking. Unsurprisingly in recent months CLC has been inundated with such cases. Since-- we've had over 100 cases in the last month of children that are needing services. And I just want to say quickly, thank you for hearing us, and I hope that we can secure funding to provide more services to these children. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alexandra, you can begin when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

ALEXANDRA RIZIO: Thank you to the Immigration Committee for inviting testimony today. My name is Alexandra Rizio and I'm the Managing Attorney for Policy and Partnerships at Safe Passage Project, a nonprofit legal services organization that provides free representation to immigrant children facing deportation. We serve almost 1,300 children who live in the five boroughs of New York City and

the two counties of Long Island. The support of the City of New York, including MOIA and, of course, the City Council has been instrumental in our work.

Unaccompanied children are the least likely group in the country to have legal representation. According to the Executive Office for Immigration Review or the Immigration Court, only 52 percent of unaccompanied children in removal proceedings are represented by counsel. In New York we estimate that the number is higher, but legal services providers are not yet able to provide universal representation despite our best efforts. Many of you have no doubt read the New York Times article, Alone and Exploited: Migrant Children Work Brutal Jobs across the US. While most of Safe Passage Project's clients have thankfully not experienced the worse labor trafficking described in the article, many do struggle with related issues.

Thanks to Safety Passages' interdisciplinary and holistic programming we're able to assist with issues that takes some of the burden off our client. For example our social workers help client's access alternative schooling so they can take GED classes if appropriate. We make referrals to employment lawyers where clients are exploited or underpaid. In

1 addition to the near universal difficulties our
2 clients face, proposed changes at the federal level
3 are also posing difficulties. Unfortunately, the
4 Biden Administration has taken a page out of Stephen
5 Miller's book and is proposing a near total asylum
6 ban. We know that migrant children are vulnerable by
7 virtue of their age and immigration status.
8 Organizations like Safe Passage and its partner
9 organizations in the I CARE Coalition will continue
10 to serve unaccompanied children. Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Sierra, you can begin
13 when the Sergeant calls time.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

15 SIERRA KRAFT: Hi, good evening. Thank
16 you to the Immigration Committee for inviting
17 testimony. My name is Sierra Kraft, and I'm the
18 Executive Director at the ICARE Coalition. ICARE is a
19 coalition of seven legal services organizations that
20 provides free representation to immigrant children
21 facing deportation in New York City with the ultimate
22 goal of universal access to counsel in coming years.
23 I want to take a moment to share our sincere
24 gratitude. Since 2014, support from City Council
25 through the Unaccompanied Minors and Family

Initiative has made it possible for the ICARE Coalition to stand alongside over 8,000 young immigrants, defend them from deportation and empower them to become leaders of tomorrow. Legal representation for the lives of many young New Yorkers has been truly life-changing. Many of the children we represent are escaping extreme violence and trauma in their home country in search of protection and safety. Without ICARE's representation, most of these children would be forced to represent themselves against a trained government lawyer. Studies show that children without representation stand just a 15 percent chance of winning their case. Loss of access to attorneys can result in the deportation of children and families to countries where their lives are at risk. As the migrant crisis intensifies, the need for legal services skyrockets. New York continues to rank fourth in country for the highest number of unaccompanied arrivals released to sponsors. Every year, nearly 2,000 young New Yorkers are placed in removal proceedings facing deportation without due process if they cannot afford a lawyer. ICARE seeks to ensure that quality legal services are offered to

all children, not only those who are able to afford them. Children represented by ICARE attorneys have more than a 90 percent success rate, and today, we renew our call to City Council to prioritize funding for the many unaccompanied minors in New York City who are reliant on the critical legal services and immigration supports that ICARE Coalition provides. Our request as a coalition is \$5.6 million this year so we can continue to serve nearly 2,000 children and families through legal screenings, Know Your Rights trainings, direct representation, and referrals to city--

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Your time expired.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much.

SIERRA KRAFT: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: No questions for this panel. I'll be taking a quick break, a five-minute break, and we'll come back in a few.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, so the next panel will consist of Francisco Acencion [sp?], Steven Moreno [sic] and Felipe Analgo Ruiz [sp?]. And if the interpreters can also come forward for this, thank you.

STEVEN LUGO: Hi. [speaking Spanish] God bless America, New York, my home sweet home. Thank you.

TRANSLATOR: Good afternoon. Thank you for having me here today. The merit that the teachers of the Department of Education of the RiseBoro Community Partnership give me to represent the voice of the students of the English to Speakers of Other Languages Program is very pleasant and warming. My name is Steven Lugo [sp?], and I am one of the more than 47,000 migrants who have come to New York City in the last eight months. I joined the last ones at five years old. I could say that I my age, which is the time that I have been living in the state of New York, a state that gave me a new rebirth, a new opportunity in life with a better prospect for my own future and the future of my family. My purpose is to call to the attention of the Immigration Committee of the New York City Council about the importance of the adult education programs offered by the City of New York and the schools of the different boroughs of the City, since it is there where I have felt the vindication of my rights and where I received the opportunity to

1
2 prepare myself as a New York citizen by learning the
3 English language to be able to express myself and
4 make myself understood in New York, to be able to
5 express my opinion and participate in a better way in
6 my work and in the community in order to help build
7 the future of New York, hand in hand with you,
8 Immigration Committee of the New York City Council.
9 We the immigrants count on you. we are in the
10 learning process so that our dreams of learning
11 American English as a second language thanks to the
12 fact that this help will allow us in the near future
13 to be able to give something back to New York City
14 with our best skills, our strength, gratitude and
15 hard work, to be able to contribute to the
16 development of the strongest, kindest, and more
17 fraternal state that immigrants carry in our hearts
18 as our new homeland that saw us reborn. To close, I
19 ask that you restore the Adult Literacy Programs and
20 expand the current budget to improve education and to
21 expand the coverage of the migrant community. I
22 remember in the words of Irving Berlin [sp?], Jewish
23 Immigrant, singer, and songwriter from New York, "God
24 bless America," the words his mother uttered before
25 she died. Those words gave name to the song that is

1
2 now even more than an anthem for Americans. It is
3 the gift of the word, a way of giving thanks,
4 building from the love of the new homeland that gave
5 him a new language to express himself. I thank you
6 for your attention, and in your hands we put the
7 opportunity to inherit like Irving back in 1893, the
8 language that gives us the ability to demonstrate the
9 gratitude that we carry within. God bless America,
10 New York, my home sweet home. Sincerely, Steven
11 Lugo.

12 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. I will be
13 in the following testimonies ask you to wrap in two
14 minutes once the alarm goes off here, but deeply
15 appreciate your presence, and please know that we
16 will be receiving your testimonies.

17 FELIPE ANALCO RUIZ: [speaking Spanish]

18 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

19 FELIPE ANALCO RUIZ: [speaking Spanish]

20 TRANSLATOR: [speaking Spanish] Our
21 presence before this New York City Immigration
22 Committee is with the purpose of restoring and adding
23 \$20.4 million dollars in funds to DYCD and the
24 Department of Youth and Community Development RFP.
25 We want contracted adult literacy program and

1 literacy services to keep existing, plus our
2 education would be enhanced if we could take
3 advantage of the renewal of the City Council
4 discretionary Adult Literacy Initiative of \$4 million
5 dollars and a \$2.5 million increase from the City
6 Council Adult Discretionary Literacy Pilot Project to
7 \$5 million dollars under the new title, Improving the
8 Adult Literacy Program. We note that we are in the
9 country of opportunities where an educated person is
10 more useful and helpful to the society in which we
11 live. Learning the language of this country is very
12 important. RiseBoro has helped me through its English
13 and Computer Study programs to prepare myself every
14 day to serve better. For a long time I have worked
15 on my own in sales and investments with Spanish-
16 speaking families. By learning the English language
17 I will have the opportunity to grow in the business
18 that I'm working on. Serving and helping is my
19 passion. The economic growth of this country is
20 important, and being able to contribute by helping
21 whoever might be in need is a commitment that every
22 citizen can make. God bless America. Thank you.
23 Sincerely Felipe Analco Ruiz.
24

25 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

FRANCISCO ACENCION: [speaking Spanish]

TRANSLATOR: Now, if I may--

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: [interposing] Go for it.

TRANSLATOR: interpret? Okay, thank you very much. Good afternoon. My name is Francisco Acencion [sp?]. I'm here representing the immigrant class and other communities. I am a student of GED in RiseBoro. It is for me very important that the program of adult education continues and that the authorities of New York City help our cost to developing it. I came here in the 1995, and until this day I'm still here fighting to be a better person. I am studying so I can surpass myself and conquer my American dream. I ask to the Committee on Immigration to fight for us and to keep the necessary funds. Thank you for your time.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you all so much. It is such an honor to hear your reflections about the adult literacy programming and how successful it has been to your survival in our city and to help you feel like you belong here in this city. So I deeply, deeply appreciate your remarks and your presence, and this Council is absolutely

committed to fighting to restore any cuts to adult literacy initiatives here, and of course expanding a much needed lifeline to our immigrant community. So thank you so much. Really appreciate that you're here at this hearing testifying. Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED: Thank you. Gracias. God bless you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: The next panel will be Ellen Pachnanda, Deborah Lee, and Katherine Kim.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ellen, you can begin when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

ELLEN PACHNANDA: Thank you. Good evening. My name is Ellen Pachnanda. I'm the Director of the Immigration Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services. I thank the New York City Council Committee on Immigration, in particular Chair Hanif, for the opportunity to testify about our budget needs to serve the immigrant community in New York City. With the Bronx Defenders and Legal Aid Society, BDS is requesting funding of \$16.6 million dollars, \$5,533,333 per organization to continue serving as

the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project's three legal service providers and to ensure continued capacity to respond to surges and changes in immigration enforcement and detention. While written testimony will go into greater detail about our program's needs, I'd like to focus on the ongoing backlog in Immigration Court and how it impacts the lives of those we represent and their complex immigration cases. the non-detained courts extended COVID-related closures and new document management practices have resulted in enormous backlog, unpredictability and case trajectory, inefficiencies in case management, and prejudicial consequences for NYFUP clients left in limbo, often separated from their families and unstable status or future status. While we recognize the changing landscape of services needed to serve New York's immigrant communities, the need for representation in removal proceedings remains critical. New York has a long history of leading the charge to protect the rights of its immigrant communities. We are seeing asylum-seekers in removal proceedings, and the Mayor's proposal which seems to incorporate pro se clinics will not be sufficient to address complex cases. We urge the

council to remain steadfast in its support for NYFUP and to ensure that our offices can continue to represent the high volume of New Yorkers in complex removal proceedings. BDS' requested funding will ensure that we continue to provide the highest quality of legal services to immigrant New Yorkers and their families. I thank the Council for its time.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Deborah, you can begin when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

DEBORAH LEE: My name is Deborah Lee and I'm the Attorney in Charge for the Immigration Law Unit at the Legal Aid Society. Thank Chair Hanif and the Committee for your support. Legal Aid Society is deeply concerned about how immigrants are being failed on multiple fronts and how their legal needs are dramatically underserved. New Yorkers are still being detained and deported. New York City Correction Officers illegally collaborate with ICE to facilitate these detentions. Detained non-citizens are transferred hundreds or thousands of miles away from their families, then are forced to defend their deportation-- against their deportation virtually in a WebX hearing with an Immigration Judge beaming in

from one jurisdiction and an ICE prosecutor beaming in from another. There is no court room to fight one's case, all in the name of administrative efficiency. Additionally, over 40,000 recently-arrived New Yorkers, including those forcibly bused to this city, struggle to find safety. Immigration Courts have reinstituted expedited dedicated dockets to force Immigration Judge to make a final decision within one year. Action NYC is overwhelmed with the need to connect people with reputable immigration service providers, and it takes months to get a legal screen. Meanwhile, nonprofits like Legal Aid struggle with limited resources and inability to provide legal representation to all. These needs will not be met solely through pro se legal clinics. Thank you, Chair Hanif, for acknowledging this earlier today. Clients not in Immigration Court are also being failed. Work permits are taking longer than a year to be processed. Foreign-born crime victims have to wait close to a decade for the security of a new [sic] Visa. Those granted asylum wait years to be reunited with their children in this country, and US citizens have interminable waits [sic] for family abroad to be scheduled for a

consular processing interviews. Our great city was built by immigrants, and we are proud to honor our own histories, our loved ones, friends, and neighbors. Legal Aid is committed to fighting for immigrants' rights on all these fronts and ask this Committee--

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: [interposing] Thank you so much.

DEBORAH LEE: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Katherine, you can begin when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

KATHERINE KIM: Yes, good afternoon.

Thank you, Chair Hanif, and to the Committee for your support and leadership. My name is Katherine Kim and I am the Interim Managing Director of the Immigration Practice at the Bronx Defenders. As one of the three NYFUP providers, we are requesting funding in the amount of \$16.6 million dollars split evenly amongst the three organizations. Today, I'd like to share information about ICE's cruel and unpredictable enforcement tactics and to explain why the Council's unwavering commitment to NYFUP is critical. In July 2022, ICE without notice transferred dozens of New

1
2 Yorkers from the Orange County Jail to remote
3 locations like Mississippi. In response, NYFUP
4 advocates sprang into action, filing release requests
5 and demanding answers from ICE. We fought hard and
6 continue to fight for our community members to be
7 released and returned home to their families in New
8 York where they belong. Since then, ICE has
9 continued to detain people at Orange County Jail
10 where conditions remain abysmal and the people we
11 represent continue experience abuse and medical
12 neglect. We thank the Council for calling on the
13 State to pass Dignity Not Detention and continue to
14 call for the release of all detained people at OCJ.
15 Finally, NYFUP has fought for recently-arrived New
16 Yorkers targeted by ICE for detention and deportation
17 while ensnared by the criminal, legal and family
18 regulation systems. As interdisciplinary public
19 defender offices, we are uniquely positioned to
20 address detained cases with these complex
21 intersecting legal issues. NYFUP remains vigilant
22 and prepared to continue fighting for the rights of
23 detained New Yorkers. Thank you again for your
24 strong support of immigrant New Yorkers and for this
25 program.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. I have a question, and any of the providers could respond to this. Could you speak to how the criminal carve-out has impacted your work? Maybe we can start with Ellen?

ELLEN PACHNANDA: There you go. I was trying to unmute, Chair. Yes, the criminal carve-out, what that makes difficult is what my colleagues have reiterated and I stated earlier is that the individuals that we represent are targeted and-- by a racist policing system and [inaudible] Katherine had mentioned within the Family Justice system in having this carve-out that exists that, again, our clients are often over-charged. This is something that makes it difficult for us because we have obviously no control of that carve-out and it's something that given the history in this city of targeting these individuals, it does make it difficult on our purposes, and also from just a matter of tracking these individual cases. we really applaud what the City Council has done to prioritize and establish this public defender model, and as Katherine was stating because we have the ability to do this interdisciplinary work, there seems no need to

1
2 exclude what really is an arbitrary list of these
3 convictions that exist on this criminal carve-out
4 list.

5 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you for that.
6 And if Deborah and Katherine want to add anything,
7 we'd welcome that. I think they might be muted.

8 KATHERINE KIM: Yes, thank you, Chair. I
9 just-- I was having trouble unmuting myself. But I
10 just wanted to reflect on the City Council's recent
11 hearing on the detainer laws and just point out that
12 these carve-outs, you know, take on a life of their
13 own and have an insidious effect, both within the
14 detainer law context and within the provision of
15 legal service providers and feeds into this narrative
16 that there's some deserving of protection and others
17 not and we as NYFUP reject that premise altogether,
18 and so I just wanted to make that point in addition
19 to what Ellen just said.

20 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. That's
21 all for the panel.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, the next panel
23 will be Greg Morris, Ruth Lopez Martinez [sp?], Milat
24 Sayom [sp?], and Nilbia Coyote. Greg, you can begin
25 when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

GREG MORRIS: Good evening. My name is Greg Morris. I am the CEO of the New York City Employment and Training Coalition. Thank you, Chair Hanif, for this hearing and to your committee. I've had the opportunity as the new CEO of the New York City Employment Training Coalition to sit in on a few hearings. This has been engaging and dynamic on many, many levels. That's a credit due to the Chair, the Committee, and this tremendous group of providers and partners who are seeking to support New York City in all the ways that matter. As CEO of the New York City Employment Training Coalition, I'm here simply to say our umbrella organization is responsible for recognizing and supporting the work of workforce development providers in the City, 220 workforce development providers in the City, and of that a full third of that particular body thinks of the immigrant community as a primary source of focus through job training, employment, career development opportunities. I'm here simply again to say we support workers cooperatives. We support investments in adult literacy. We want to ensure that access to childcare is available to all in addition to ensuring

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Ruth, you can begin
when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

RUTH LOPEZ MARTINEZ: [speaking Spanish]

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: One-- sorry, one second, Ruth. One second.

TRANSLATOR: [speaking Spanish] Okay, perfect.

RUTH LOPEZ MARTINEZ: [speaking Spanish]

TRANSLATOR: Good afternoon. My name is Ruth Lopez Martinez and I'm a worker for the cooperative Pa'lante [speaking Spanish]

RUTH LOPEZ MARTINEZ: [speaking Spanish]

TRANSLATOR: Pa'lante Green Cleans [sic]

RUTH LOPEZ MARTINEZ: [speaking Spanish]

TRANSLATOR: That's the cooperative I work for and we offer services in cleaning offices, apartments, and buildings. Okay, so if I ask the permission of the Council, actually they can do simultaneous interpretation. [speaking Spanish]

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Yeah, that's fine. I'm fine with that.

TRANSLATOR: [speaking Spanish] Okay, perfect, so--

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: You can come right over. You can stop the clock, yeah. Great.

TRANSLATOR: [speaking Spanish]

RUTH LOPEZ MARTINEZ: [speaking Spanish]

TRANSLATOR: [inaudible] for this
opportunity.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Gracias.

TRANSLATOR: [inaudible] get the last
part, no problem.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you. Thank you
so much. Deep appreciation to our interpreters
today.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Milat [sp?], you can
go when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.
Starting time.

KATE TISCUS: There we go. Hi. My name
is actually Kate Tiscus [sp?], standing in for Milat
Sayom [sp?] who had to leave, and she was actually
going to read testimony from somebody else. That
chain of events. Thank you so much for the
opportunity to testify, and I am reading testimony
from Gale Johnson. She said, "I'm worker/owner at
Hope All Care Childcare Cooperative, a member of
Carol Gardens Association, and I'm here in behalf of
the 13 organizations that make up the worker

cooperative business development initiative. As an immigrant worker who has been a nanny for many years, our cooperative has made 11 black and indigenous women of color from the Caribbean, Latin America, and Nepal, speaking four languages: French Creole, Bengal, Spanish, and English. We founded in 2017, creating employment for our members who support families here and abroad. We provide mutual and emotional support to our members. As immigrant women, we support many NYC Coalitions who are fighting for housing, for climate change, immigrant justice, social justice, coverage for all, public bank, just to name a few, as we provide much-needed services in communities all across New York City. We're grateful for the WCBDI who provided legal support from Take Root Justice as well as training on technology, industry training and health, safety, and childcare from other coalition partners. Carol Gardens Association has been our incubator and continues to support us with our day-to-day needs. As you know, childcare is not a socially-distant service, and as a result of the pandemic, our cooperative and our immigrant community has experienced a lot of challenges in our industry

1 including housing insecurity, income challenges,
2 accessibility, and immigration restrictions. We work
3 in solidarity with allied organizations like NDWA,
4 NICNOC [sic] worker cooperatives, and hand in hand
5 we're able to foster better working conditions for
6 our members. We're grateful for your support in
7 passing Intro 339 and the Human Rights Act for All
8 Workers in the Care Industry. We believe the City
9 should do more to provide grants and loans to small
10 businesses--
11

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
13 expired.

14 KATE TISCUS: Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Nilbia, you can begin
17 when the Sergeant calls time.

18 NILBIA COYOTE: Hi everyone. My name is
19 Nilbia Coyote, Executive Director at New Immigrant
20 Community Empowerment, NICE. We're grateful to the
21 Immigration Committee for your time today, and it's
22 an honor to hear workers. [speaking Spanish] NICE
23 mission is to organize immigrant workers, day
24 laborers, asylees, and newly-arrived immigrants in
25 New York City to build their collective power. We

combine the strength of workers development training, workers' rights, advocacy, and programs catered to immigrant workers in construction, food services, domestic work sectors, to name a few. I'm delivering this testimony on behalf of the tens of thousands of NICE members who are working hard to find a safe and dignified future for them and their families in Queens and throughout the City. We're here today to call on the City Council to not only continue investing in organizations like NICE, but to increase that investment in recognition of the growing obstacles the community and organizations face. Specifically, we call for increased funding support of the Day Laborer Workforce Initiative totaling \$5.875 million, as well as the law which workers support adult literacy and the construction site safety training. These programs in conjunction with our dedicated one-on-one support respond directly to the many challenges immigrant workers face, whether they have been here for 10 years, six months, or are arriving directly to our office from Port Authority with just the clothes on their backs, as often happens. In the past year and a half, we have often seen our foot traffic swell to numbers higher than

1 ever in the worst moments of the pandemic. Our
2 community is experiencing housing insecurity, hunger,
3 wage theft, job insecurity, and workplace injuries at
4 alarming rates. They need and deserve dignified
5 housing, food, and healthcare resources as well. And
6 equally important, they need support tools and
7 resources to plan for the future as new New Yorkers.
8 They need a safe job and steady income. In 2022
9 alone, NICE helped workers recover a quarter of a
10 million dollars in stolen wages. Welcomed 1,500 new
11 members to the NICE community--

12
13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
14 expired.

15 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much.

16 NILBIA COYOTE: [inaudible] Thank you so
17 much.

18 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Appreciate it. No
19 questions for this panel.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alright, the next
21 panel will be Lucy Sexton, Dmitri Daniel Glinski,
22 Monique Pena [sp?], Priscilla Adom [sp?], and Alex
23 Stein. Lucy, you may begin when the Sergeant calls
24 time.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

LUCY SEXTON: [inaudible] these things are so fascinating.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

LUCY SEXTON: Hello? Can you hear me?

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Yes.

LUCY SEXTON: Okay, great. Sorry, I am here. I do want to testify. There's my video. Hi. Thank you for hearing me. I have been traveling through my day and this has been an amazing hearing. Thank you, Chair Hanif and City Council. I'm Lucy Sexton of New Yorkers for Culture and Arts, a coalition of more than 300 cultural organizations and artists from across the five boroughs. I'm here to highlight the key role that culture plays in the City's immigrant communities. To state the obvious, they-- the culture-- the immigrant communities are a unique part of the City's vibrant culture. One need only look at the line-up of Queensboro Dance Festival which includes an amazing array of groups from our most-diverse borough, [inaudible] Dance Company, Kendig Shinda [sp?] Indigenous Philippine Group-- we go on and on. The City is rightly proud of them. The only thing they need is more support of the work they do. In recent months we have seen cultural

groups respond and provide emergency relief to newly-arrived asylum-seekers from clothing drives at El Museo Del Barrio and other cultural centers to full arts festivals engaging new immigrants at the Clemente Center in the Lower East Side. The City's cultural groups have risen to the occasion. They reach out in culturally-connected and authentic ways to welcome and support our newest New Yorkers. All they need is more robust support. There's a show in Brooklyn, Saint Anne's Warehouse, called The Jungle. The play's writers lived in and set up a large tent in the middle of a sprawling camp of asylum-seekers waiting for months and years on the French boarder. The tent served as a make-shift cultural center. Kids came to the center to draw, teens did rap battles, and grown-ups gathered to tell stories and connect across cultural barriers. In the words of one of the participants, "In this camp, lots of charity groups think all we need is food and shelter. We also need this, a place to gather to express ourselves and to connect, to remember our humanity, to find release and joy." City social workers in the Be Heard Program report increasing mental health issues in

newly-arrived immigrants housed in hotels and shelters.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

LUCY SEXTON: And on their children.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you so much, Lucy.

LUCY SEXTON: [inaudible] new schools. We need--

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Dmitri, you can begin when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

DMITRI GLINSKI: Okay, you hear me? Okay. Thank you, Chair Hanif. Our Russian-speaking Community Council [inaudible] 11-year-old CBO run by immigrants, refugees, and asylees. We're a network of project organizing and public awareness, but also document translations, community litigation, etcetera on a [inaudible] pro bono basis. Last year, I testified on the influx of Ukrainians and Russians fleeing from the war, and this war has kept growing. Yet, not one Russian or Ukrainian CBO has the other [sic] agency support to provide direct services. It might be time to try to use the budgetary process to start addressing some long-standing inequities behind

us. I'll bring an example that may be quite sensitive to some and may put myself at risk, but I have to share it. UJ Federation is a major city philanthropy generously serving my own Jewish communities and beyond [inaudible] specialized partner agencies. For decades they were the service hub and the lifeline for newcomers of all faiths. Yet, in the past 15 years, this agency shut down and downsized their units that had served specifically immigrants from our region and had offered them opportunity community service. In Fiscal Year 22, [inaudible] were paid \$250 million from city budget for their great work as prime vendors, but only about one percent of it was for immigrant services, even though by UJA own data immigrants comprised close to 20 percent of our New York Jewish population, most of them from Ukraine and Russia. By comparison in Fiscal Year 22, there was only one Russian and one Ukrainian CBO paid by the City for a total of less than \$30,000. Our immigrant-led CBO's [inaudible] my community faced [sic] the fact monopoly [sic] immigrant services and never subcontract to help provider. I bet there are similar barriers elsewhere that can mega-size [sic] service providers and

1
2 immigrant CBOs. For the past 15 years we've been
3 raising these issues behind closed doors and
4 [inaudible] workers agree that our city must strive
5 to remedy possible [sic] continuing harms [sic] and
6 promote justice and equity for all New Yorkers. In
7 this spirit, I hope that City Council may consider
8 using the budgetary process to encourage large
9 immigration service vendors to promote--

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time
11 expired.

12 DMITRI GLINKSI: [inaudible] or
13 immigrant-led CBOs with new--

14 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: [interposing] Thank
15 you.

16 DMITRI GLINKSI: [inaudible]

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Monique, you can
18 begin when the Sergeant calls time.

19 MONIQUE PENA: Dear New York City Council
20 [inaudible]. My name is Monique Pena. I was born
21 and raised in Bushwick, Brooklyn. I am currently a
22 student at RiseBoro Community Partnership GED
23 Program. At the age of five I was diagnosed with
24 cerebral palsy. Cerebral palsy is a disorder that
25 affects a personal-- a person disability to move and

1 maintain balance and posture. This condition has
2 brought me many challenges including graduating from
3 high school. Because of my disability I feel that it
4 is important to have a local GED program that I can
5 easily commute to and from my home. RiseBoro GED
6 program has not only been a place where I could
7 prepare for the GED exam, but I could also get the
8 support I need in order to achieve my education
9 goals. At RiseBoro the counselors prepared with
10 resources to social services. The support that I had
11 received at RiseBoro is essentially to my personal
12 life as well as my education. My goal is to obtain
13 my high school equivalency diploma. I have
14 recommended RiseBoro GED program to friends and
15 family in the chest because I know that they have
16 helped many people with obtaining their GED. I ask
17 that you restore adult literacy funding. Thank you.
18 Sincerely, Monique Pena.

19
20 CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Priscilla, you can
22 begin when the Sergeant calls time.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

24 PRISCILLA ADON: Hi. Thank you for the
25 opportunity for testify. My name is Priscilla Adon

[sp?]. I am from Ecuador and I have lived here in New York with my family for 12 years. I studied English at Make the Road New York for two cycles. Four years ago I begun work as an adult literacy admin assistant here. First part-time, I now full-time. People that study at Make the Road because we offer free classes with different schedules and our classes are very good, because teacher give the students the tools they need to communicate with their children's teachers or at medical appointments. Also, a student learns about their rights. Our [inaudible] is special too because we have a great case management team who helps to connect the students with the services. I work very hard, because I want our students to have the same opportunity as me, to work on my dedicated team helping the community to feel more powerful. We need your help to make sure that programs like ours that change people leave can [inaudible]. The Mayor wants to cut programs very badly at a time when there are already too few opportunities to study. We need the same funding and more office at the rate of that programs like Make the Road can serve students well and still cover our cost. This is what we're asking

you to do. Renew the \$4 million dollars Adult Literacy Initiative with better per-student rate, and include \$150,000 for Make the Road to provide English citizenship and career training classes. Renew and expand the Adult Literacy Pilot project to \$5 million dollars and allocate \$150,000 to Make the Road to enhance our services. Restore and baseline \$20.4 million dollars for DYCD Adult Literacy RFP programs, and allocate it--

SERGEANT AT ARMS: [interposing] Time expired.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

PRISCILLA PENA: [inaudible] Make the Road.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you.

PRISCILLA PENA: Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alex, you can begin when the Sergeant calls time.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

ALEX STEIN: well, you guys sounded really excited to hear from me. I don't know why you have to have that low energy. Hey, I've had yet to hear anybody talk about the major issue we have with immigration. We're talking about the drug

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: If we have inadvertently missed anyone who'd like to testify, please raise your hand in Zoom or go to the Sergeant's table. It doesn't look like anyone is here in person. Seeing no one else, I would just like to note that written testimony which will be reviewed in full by Committee Staff may be submitted to the record up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing by emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov.

CHAIRPERSON HANIF: Thank you all so much. It's been a long day. We've learned a lot and I'm deeply appreciative of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs participation and their detailed reports and responses to our questions. And of course, to everyone who testified this afternoon going into the evening, thank you all so much for your advocacy, your direct service work, all of the innovations, all that you're doing to show that New York City is committed to a Sanctuary City, and we'll be fighting together for a just budget that reflects the needs, the diverse needs of our immigrant communities not limited to undocumented and asylum-seekers, and of course, we will not forget about unaccompanied minors, young people, GNC, Trans, and

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COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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queer people as well. Thank you all so much, and I

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will gavel us out. Have a good evening.

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[gavel]

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COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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 March 17, 2023