

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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March 5, 2024
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HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Alexa Avilés,
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Erik D. Bottcher
Gale A. Brewer
Carmen N. De La Rosa
Shahana K. Hanif
Rita C. Joseph
Shekar Krishnan

A P P E A R A N C E S

Molly Scheffer
Director of the Asylum Seeker Office of
Operations

Manuel Castro
Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant
Affairs

Jasniya Sanchez
Deputy Chief of Staff

Tom Tortorici
Executive Director of Legal Support Initiatives

Monique A. Francis
CUNY Citizenship NOW

Meetu Dhar
CUNY Citizenship NOW

Liza D Schwartzwald
New York Immigration Coalition

Margaret Martin
Catholic Charities Community Services

Kelly Agnew-Barajas
Catholic Charities Community Services,
Archdiocese of New York

Harold Solis
Make the Road New York

Karla Ostolaza
Bronx Defenders

Ellen Pachnanda
Brooklyn Defender Services

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

Deborah Lee
The Legal Aid Society

Tania Mattos
Unlocal

Marc Valinoti
NMIC

Alexandra L Rizio
Safe Passage Project

Ira Yankwitt
The Literacy Assistance Center

Lena Cohen
United Neighborhood Houses

Sierra Kraft
ICARE Coalition

Sophie Dalsimer
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

Vladimir Martinez
LGBT Community Center

Abigail Dorcin
La Colmena

Vianey Romero-Mendez
Mixteca

Ana Galeana
Mixteca Organization

Dmitri Daniel Glinski
Russian-speaking Community Council Inc (RCC)

Rex Chen
Legal Services NYC

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

Melissa Chua
NYLAG

Oriana Shulevitz Rosado
Immigrant ARC

Carlyn Cowen
CPC NYC

Mohamed Q. Amin
Caribbean Equality Project

1
2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Mic check, mic check, mic
3 check. Sound check, sound checks on the Committee on
4 Immigration. Today's date is March 5, 2024 located
5 in the Chambers recorded by Walter Lewis.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Quiet please. Thank you.
7 Good morning and welcome to the New York City Hybrid
8 Hearing on the Preliminary Budget on Immigration.
9 Please silence all electronic devices. At no time
10 during or after the hearing, please do not approach
11 the dais. If you have any questions, please raise
12 your hand and one of us, the Sergeant at Arms will
13 kindly assist you. Thank you very much for your kind
14 cooperation. Chair, we are ready to begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: [GAVEL] Good morning
16 everyone. This meeting is being called to order. I
17 am Council Member Alexa Avilés, Chair of the
18 Committee on Immigration. Welcome to today's hearing
19 on the city's Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Budget.

20 Before we begin, I would like to thank all of
21 those who have joined us today. New York City is
22 home to more than 3 million immigrants. That is at
23 minimum. 36 percent of New York City's total
24 population. Since the Spring of 2022, the city has
25 experienced as we know an influx of asylum seekers,

1 and as February 2024, over 177,000 asylum seekers
2 have arrived in New York City. Of this total, over
3 65,000 remain in New York City. Of this total, over
4 65,000 remain in the care of the city. The
5 Administration has responded to the influx by opening
6 217 emergency shelters across five boroughs, 18
7 HERRCs, and has been collaborating with nonprofit
8 organizations to run the navigation center, satellite
9 sites, and the asylum legal application centers. So
10 far, the Department of Education has expanded seats
11 to over 32,000 migrant students. According to the
12 American Community Survey, data shows how resources
13 for immigrants are crucial and city agencies must
14 better collaborate. At today's hearing, the
15 Committee will examine the Fiscal 2025 Preliminary
16 Budget and how it addresses the needs of existing and
17 new immigrants in our city. We will review in depth
18 how the budget prioritizes and/or addresses services
19 for the immigrant population. Again, and I'm not
20 going to be able to say it enough, they make up 40
21 percent of New York City's population. And how the
22 city plans to further invest in immigrant neighbors.
23

24 The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, Fiscal
25 2025 budget total \$746,000. That supports six

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2 positions and similar to the fiscal 2024 adopted
3 budget, this budget doesn't provide a full picture of
4 MOIAs budget. Nor the full scope of services New
5 York City provides to immigrants that are spread
6 across various city agencies including the Department
7 of Youth and Community Development, the Human
8 Resources Administration, the Department of
9 Education, and New York City Health and Hospitals.
10 The Office of Asylum Seeker Operations, a newly
11 created office exactly one year ago, also manages and
12 coordinates varying services that support asylum
13 seekers in New York City.

14 In today's hearing, we will examine OASOs
15 collaboration with city agencies and how the office
16 carries on its roles and responsibilities.
17 Furthermore, the Committee will ensure that the city
18 is not duplicating efforts and we think taxpayer
19 dollars on two offices that serve to aim – that aim
20 to serve immigrants but have little operational
21 authority over any programs.

22 I want to state it clearly, despite the claims of
23 importance of services at an ever-increasing need,
24 this budget has substantially reduced funding for
25 immigrant legal services and adult literacy programs.

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2 Without proper legal representation, asylum seeker
3 immigrant status will remain in limbo. With profound
4 long-term impacts, adult literacy is one of the most
5 critical programs for immigrant integration and
6 fundamental to democratic participation and stability
7 of communities. And yet, it constantly seems to be
8 the target of defunding and devaluing.

9 This defunding of literacy and legal services
10 undermines opportunities that we seek to create in
11 our civil society and it just doesn't make sense and
12 must be addressed immediately. The Committee is
13 calling on the Administration to include \$150 million
14 to enhance immigrant legal services and revise the
15 adult literacy RFP. Baseline \$21.7 million and add
16 an additional \$10 million to adequately fund city
17 adult education. I want to emphasize the need for
18 adequate funding levels for services because this is
19 about sustainability of services for immigrant New
20 Yorkers. 40 percent of the city's population.

21 We must think long term while managing some of
22 these immediate concerns. Also, it is important to
23 remind our colleagues in government and know that for
24 New Yorkers, that a 2020 northwestern study showed
25 Regents with higher rates of immigration also

1
2 experienced higher gains in per capita income,
3 relative to other cities with lower rates of
4 immigration. Largely explained by higher rates of
5 entrepreneurship among immigrants. Knowing that
6 immigrants actually improve economic outcomes for our
7 native-born workers, we should be seizing the
8 opportunity to unlock that potential and be proactive
9 when engaging in issues of inequity to ensure some
10 form of stability for immigrant families in need.

11 I look forward to hearing from the
12 Administration's strategy and budget plan and how it
13 engages with agencies to best serve immigrants,
14 again, who comprise how much? 40 percent of New York
15 City's population. After we hear from MOIA and OASO,
16 the Committee will hear testimony from the public.
17 Last, I would like to thank the speaker and the mayor
18 in supporting needs of our immigrant communities.
19 I'd also want to make sure that we thank our
20 committee staff for their hard work Florentine
21 Kabore, Nia Hyatt, Nicole Cata, Rebecca Barilla and
22 my staff Christina Bottego and Edward Cerna for all
23 their hard work.

24 Now, I'd like to - actually oh, no she's not
25 here. Okay, I thought I saw a Council Member pop in.

1
2 Now, I'd like to welcome the Commissioner of the
3 Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs Manuel Castro and
4 the Interim Director of the Office of Asylum Seeker
5 Operations, OASO.

6 And before we hear from them, Committee Counsel
7 will swear you in.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Avilés. We
9 will now hear testimony from the Administration.
10 Before we begin, I will administer the affirmation.
11 Panelists, please raise your right hand. Do you
12 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and
13 nothing but the truth before this Committee and to
14 respond honestly to Council Member questions?
15 Interim Director Molly Schaeffer?

16 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I do.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Commissioner Castro?

18 MANUEL CASTRO: I do.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Deputy Chief of Staff Jasniya
20 Sanchez?

21 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: I do.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: ED Legal and Support
23 Initiatives Tom Tortorici?

24 TOM TORTORICI: I do.
25

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may begin
3 when ready.

4 MANUEL CASTRO: Thank you Chair Avilés and
5 Committee on Immigration and Committee on Finance for
6 holding this Budget Hearing. My name is Manuel
7 Castro and I am the Commissioner of the Mayor's
8 Office of Immigrant Affairs. I am joined by Deputy
9 Chief of Staff Jasniya Sanchez, Executive Director of
10 Legal Support Initiatives Tom Tortorici, and Director
11 of the Asylum Seeker Office of Operations Molly
12 Schaeffer.

13 First, I would like to thank Council Member Hanif
14 for her work and dedication as Chair of this
15 Committee over the last two years. I would also like
16 to welcome Chair Alexa Avilés to her new role as
17 Chair of this Committee and I look forward to working
18 closely with you and your staff. The following
19 testimony will highlight five key areas of the lands
20 work in the past fiscal year and that we are looking
21 to further develop in the next fiscal year.

22 These are MOIAs immigration legal programs, MOIAs
23 English Learning Program, MOIAs Language Access Work,
24 MOIAs community engagement work and MOIAs role in
25 responding to the asylum seeker humanitarian crisis.

1 First, MOIAs Immigration Legal Programs. MOIAs
2 Immigration Legal programs include MOIAs immigration
3 legal support centers, also known as Action NYC.
4 MOIAs Immigration Legal Support Hotline, MOIAs Asylum
5 Seeker Legal Assistance Network, also known as ASLAN.
6 MOIAs Haitian Response Initiative, MOIAs Rapid
7 Response Legal Assistance Program and MOIAs Immigrant
8 Rights Program.
9

10 Together, these initiatives along with other
11 efforts across New York City government, seek to
12 expand access to New Yorks Immigrant communities with
13 immigration legal support. MOIAs specific role is to
14 reach hard to reach communities and develop local
15 capacity within these communities. To do so, we
16 contract with nonprofit providers to achieve this
17 work, acknowledging the critical role nonprofits play
18 in reaching communities where they live and
19 cultivating trusting and ongoing relationships with
20 them.

21 In 2023, MOIAs Immigration Legal Support Centers
22 conducted over 14,000 comprehensive legal screenings
23 and opened over 5,600 new cases. Along with these
24 centers, MOIA oversees an immigration legal support
25 hotline available to all New Yorkers for basic

1 consultations and referrals. In 2023, more than
2 60,000 people called our hotline. The Asylum Seeker
3 Legal Assistance Network or ASLAN made up an
4 innovative partnership between MOIA, community based
5 legal service providers and the City University of
6 New York provides asylum seekers both in and out of
7 the city's shelter system with information,
8 individualized screenings and application assistance.
9 The network also provides immigration legal
10 orientations to frontline staff such as shelter
11 workers and self-help workshops for asylum seekers,
12 so that they may better understand their rights and
13 responsibilities in the immigration process.

14 Since launching in 2023, ASLAN has made more than
15 8,000 people participated in ASLAN information
16 sessions and workshops and more than 3,300 community
17 members received individual consultations with ASLAN
18 legal staff, which is followed by brief advise,
19 application assistance, either ASLAN TPS and work
20 authorization, post application assistance or
21 referral to legal help.

22 Now MOIAs language access work. MOIA made
23 significant strides in building out the language
24 access team since last year, in the last year which
25

1
2 now includes 20 in house experts and advisors on
3 language access, up from three when I started my time
4 at MOIA. This includes 12 language access
5 specialists who not only serve as professional
6 linguists but also has important links to their
7 language communities. The teams main goal is to
8 offer technical assistance to mayoral offices, city
9 agencies, and key external partners. It also
10 provides translation and interpretation services for
11 mayoral offices and reports on city governments
12 language access work and local implementation
13 relating to language access.

14 To provide critical information to both long time
15 and recently arrived immigrant New Yorkers, MOIA
16 translated a range of materials into over 50
17 languages. MOIAs language access team provided
18 translated communication materials, including
19 signage, website resources, translation and
20 interpretation services, service information, emails
21 and scripts and so on. Because of these translated
22 materials, our team has been working to better equip
23 the city to provide shelter services, legal support
24 referrals, shelter, protocol updates, and materials
25 to promote humanitarian and emergency response

1 relief. Language specialists also provide onsite
2 language support to in Arabic, Walla, French,
3 Spanish, Mandarin and Cantonese to newly arrived
4 immigrants at the asylum application help center.
5 Federal work authorization clinic, humanitarian
6 emergency response relief centers, reticketing center
7 and the Roosevelt Hotel arrival center.
8

9 Next, MOIAs English learning and support centers.
10 As we work to build language access across the city,
11 English Language proficiency remains a factor in
12 accessing education, employment, health and social
13 services. That's why my office has launched MOIA,
14 English learning and support centers, located
15 immigrant dense communities. These centers use our
16 award winning, We Speak NYC curriculum to host
17 beginner and intermediate level in person English
18 classes. Our curriculum is unique as it uses filmed
19 stories and workbooks that highlight city services
20 and promote civic engagement. Our centers are hosted
21 at ten partner community-based organizations and we
22 are also scaling collaboration at more than 60 New
23 York City public libraries across New York City.

24 This year, the program is also rolling out a
25 beginner level curriculum which had for long been

1
2 missing from our programs offering. This new
3 curriculum aims to improve access to both language,
4 English language learning and familiarity with city
5 services.

6 Next, MOIAs community engagement. MOIAs outreach
7 work is done to promote our specific programs but
8 also to compliment outreach work done across city
9 offices and agencies but important to note here that
10 all city offices and agencies have their own outreach
11 staff which also conducts in are mainly responsible
12 for doing outreach.

13 In 2023, MOIAs external affairs team made over
14 54,000 touchpoints with community members, including
15 some in some of the most underserved communities in
16 our city. This includes active participation in
17 resource fairs tabling Know Your Rights presentations
18 and canvassing across the five boroughs. The team
19 also connects immigrant New Yorkers to the help they
20 need by offering real time support system through in
21 person public facing events and through our phone and
22 email hotline.

23 In 2023, the team responded to nearly 6,000
24 inquiries for assistance. MOIA also let nine
25 immigrant media roundtables to ensure effective

1 information dissemination. The roundtables
2 facilitate information flow to the immigrant
3 communities via hyperlocal newspapers and TV stations
4 in their own language. The roundtables also
5 strengthen relationship with immigrant focus media
6 outlets. In the last year, we have worked with NYC
7 emergency management, NYC Cares, and Health and
8 Hospitals, Department of Youth and Community
9 Development, NYC Small Business Services, Mayor's
10 Office to end domestic gender-based violence, Office
11 of Technology and Innovation, the Department of
12 Consumer and Worker Protections, and the Civic
13 Engagement Commissioner Implement NYC.

14
15 Next, asylum seeker humanitarian crisis, MOIAs
16 role. At the outset of the asylum seeker
17 humanitarian crisis, MOIA was on the ground welcoming
18 asylum seekers when they started arriving at Port
19 Authority bus terminal. We responded immediately and
20 our multiple teams pulled together to ensure arriving
21 asylum seekers and community groups mobilized and to
22 support them, had the assistance from our office.

23 While we are very proud of this work, after many
24 months of this work, and myself personally welcome in
25 asylum seekers, we realize this was not sustainable

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2 for our office, which was not set up to operate such
3 situations. Therefore, in 2023, the city prohibited
4 to an interagency effort, asking New York City
5 Management and Health + Hospitals took over the
6 operation of management of the humanitarian crisis to
7 welcome asylum seekers.

8 The city also created the Office of Asylum Seeker
9 Operations or OASO in 2023 to provide overall
10 coordination. You will hear more about this office
11 shortly. Recognizing the importance of connecting
12 immigrant New Yorkers to services, MOIA funded
13 community-based organizations as navigator centers to
14 help in this effort. The navigation centers were
15 modeled after our Haitian Response Initiative, which
16 proved to be successful in supporting community
17 organizations working to address the needs of newly
18 arrived immigrants.

19 We've also worked to include one of most
20 innovative projects to incubate one of the most
21 innovative projects in response to the arrival of
22 asylum seekers through the Mayor's fund. Working in
23 partnership with our philanthropic partners, we
24 funded nine community-based organizations to launch
25 the Immigrant Peer Navigator program. The program

1
2 connect recent arrivals with long time immigrant
3 mentors to give them tips on surviving and navigating
4 live in New York City, including finding work,
5 housing and building community connections.

6 ASLAN, as I mentioned before was developed to
7 compliment of OASO that OASO is overseeing at the
8 Asylum Application Help Center which you will hear
9 more about shortly. ASLAN is meant serve a broader
10 population and provide long term capacity to
11 nonprofit partners on the ground. Addressing this
12 humanitarian crisis also requires engagement with all
13 levels of government. Therefore, in 2023, MOIA
14 worked to coordinate local, state, and national
15 advocacy on behalf of immigrant New Yorkers. In
16 part, the coalition of nearly 200 U.S. cities in
17 local government, called Cities for Action.

18 The coalition mobilized to send sign on letters
19 to the Biden Administration to accelerate work permit
20 processing and redesignate or designate 11 countries
21 for temporary protective status. Two of these
22 countries, Cameroon and Venezuela were redesignated
23 in the weeks that follow opening access to work
24 authorization and we continue to advocate for more.

1
2 In conclusion, finally, in this testimony I am
3 not covering all of MOIAs work as it would be simply
4 too long. MOIAs annual report will be available on
5 March 15 and will include a full description of MOIAs
6 work. My hope of highlighting these five key areas
7 will give you the sense of our work and well within
8 city government. Thank you again for calling this
9 hearing, Chair, I look forward to working with the
10 Council as the budget process continues and as I
11 usually do, I want to thank MOIA staff for all their
12 work in the last couple of years in addition to
13 Jasniya and Tom, Lorena Lucero, Eileen, Derick, and
14 Miguel join me here today. Also, many of them are
15 watching. I also want to give a special shoutout to
16 the many hundreds of city employees and our partners
17 working in response to the humanitarian crisis.
18 Thank you so much and now, I will hand it over to
19 Molly Schaeffer.

20 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Good morning Chair Avilés and
21 the Immigration and Finance Committees. My name is
22 Molly Schaeffer and I serve as the Interim Director
23 of New York City's Mayor's Office of Asylum Seeker
24 Operation, OASO. I'm grateful for the opportunity to
25 discuss our offices budget and operational impact on

1
2 the city's shelter operations. Since April 2022, New
3 York City has been leading the countries response to
4 the migrant emergency, a national humanitarian crisis
5 providing critical support to over 181,000
6 individuals who have sought refuge and received
7 assistance from our system.

8 A number that reflects the sheer magnitude of our
9 commitment to humanitarian aid and support. We have
10 led for the last two years with care and compassion
11 and we cannot lose site of the extraordinary scale of
12 this emergency. This year, New York City is
13 projected to spend more than \$4 billion on asylum
14 seeker operations. The city's \$4.05 billion
15 operation includes five sheltering agencies and more
16 than 20 others supporting the response. A whole of
17 government and society approach and a monumental
18 undertaking to manage. Every week between 1,000 and
19 5,000 new arrivals come into our system. The scale
20 and speed required to provide services and support to
21 people and during the city is unprecedented. When we
22 started this administration, there were 45,000 people
23 in shelter. It took 40 years to build that system
24 and in less than two years, we have almost tripled
25 that number to 120,700 people. With over 64,000 new

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2 arrivals currently in care. More than 181,000 people
3 have come through our intake since spring of 2022 and
4 have opened more than 217 emergency sites to manage
5 this humanitarian influx.

6 We've provided healthcare, education, work
7 training, jobs, legal support and much, much more.
8 This is a story of New York City stepping up and
9 managing and doing everything possible with little to
10 no support. This administration announced OASO in
11 March 2023 as the central team managing the city's
12 asylum seeker response effort. The office was
13 designed to lead interagency coordination of policy,
14 data, budget and regulatory considerations. Lead
15 advocacy and lead strategic initiatives necessary to
16 manage this critical mission. One of the proudest
17 achievements of this administration is the first in
18 the nation Asylum Application Help Center that opened
19 last summer. Since opening, I'm proud to report that
20 we've completed over 37,000 asylum work and temporary
21 protective status applications helping get people on
22 the pathway to work and legal citizenship.

23 We've opened three satellite sites and partnered
24 with nonprofits, law firms and the state and federal
25 government. Our centers staffed with over 150

1
2 application assistance immigration attorneys and
3 interpreters, exemplifies New York City's commitment
4 to supporting individuals in their pursuit of the
5 American Dream.

6 OASO operates with a lean yet dedicated team of
7 ten full-time staff with a personnel budget of \$1.7
8 million per year. While OASO serves as a vital
9 coordinating entity leading the city's response, it's
10 important to note that we do not directly manage
11 shelter operations or oversee operational expenses or
12 any contracts related to this work. OASO does not
13 have an agency chief contracting officer or manage an
14 OTPS budget, instead, we collaborate across city
15 agencies to develop policy, support implementation,
16 leverage expertise across multiple sectors and drive
17 informed decision making.

18 OASO was created to move the city towards a more
19 steady state of operations, and the proof of our
20 progress is in the results. In the preliminary plan,
21 our office spearheaded a 20 percent reduction on
22 asylum seeker costs, more than \$1.7 billion in
23 savings over Fiscal Year 2024 and Fiscal Year 2025.
24 And we were able to do that without compromising
25 services.

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2 Let me say that again. We were able to
3 accomplish this while responding to an unprecedented
4 crisis more effectively and efficiently. That is a
5 win both for New Yorkers and a win for people in our
6 shelter systems. We take our fiscal responsibility
7 seriously and are now taking a ten percent budget cut
8 to ensure we're bringing our costs in line with DHS.

9 In closing, I want to reiterate this
10 administration's unwavering commitment to upholding
11 the values of compassion, efficiency, and
12 accountability, as we navigate this complex
13 humanitarian crisis. Thank you for the opportunity
14 to testify today and I look forward to your
15 questions.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you both for your
17 testimony and we certainly have a lot to get through,
18 so I just ask that we keep our answers concise so we
19 can get through the majority of it and some of this
20 might be duplicative within your testimony to
21 disaggregate it to make sure that it's just clearly
22 separated on the record. So, thank you for bearing
23 with us. So, let's jump in with you Commissioner
24 Castro first. Can you walk us through MOIAs role and
25 responsibility?

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2 MANUEL CASTRO: Thank you Chair Avilés for the
3 question. So, MOIA has a limited scope in terms of
4 our role in responsibility with respect to serving
5 immigrant populations. As I described, we oversee a
6 number of different programs in particular our
7 immigration legal programs but it's important to
8 point out that multiple agencies including DSS and
9 DYCD manage their own immigration legal programs.
10 They are not required to include us in their work
11 although we often support and promote their work. We
12 specifically focus on the programs that we laid out.
13 I also described in my testimony our work around
14 language access, which is highly collaborative with
15 other agencies because we collect and report on
16 language access plans. And as I described that I've
17 been able to grow the team from three when I first
18 took office to now twenty, which was a major priority
19 of ours and something really to highlight about MOIA.

20 We offer technical assistance and support to
21 those agencies that need it and we often serve as the
22 champions for language access in city government. I
23 also described our work around English learning,
24 which again, other agencies manage English learning
25 programs but our specific program that we oversee

1
2 looks to provide very practical English learning
3 courses with an emphasis on conversational English
4 and also to educate immigrant communities on city
5 services and engage them in civic participation. We
6 do this in partnership with CBOs and libraries and
7 other institutions.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, I'm sorry Commissioner.
9 Just, could you give me a, if we think about it as a
10 pie chart, a general sense of the breakdown of the
11 work that your very small but mighty team engages in?

12 We have direct service. We have technical
13 assistance. We have advocacy. How would you
14 characterize the distribution of work that your
15 office manages? If you could, obviously it's not
16 going to be specific.

17 MANUEL CASTRO: Yeah, yeah, I think it might be
18 helpful to describe our staffing structure. So, we
19 have currently three staff overseeing legal services,
20 Tom included. Most of our work on legal services is
21 outsourced, meaning that we contract with nonprofit
22 providers to do this work. Our English Learning
23 program is staffed by three individuals. Our
24 language access staff as I mentioned -
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: I'm sorry Commissioner, the
3 English programs are staffed by three individuals?

4 MANUEL CASTRO: Yes.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Yes, okay so three for
6 language access, three for legal services.

7 MANUEL CASTRO: 20 for language access, 11 for
8 policy and 15 for external affairs. If you want a
9 further breakdown, Jas could provide but I just
10 wanted to give you a sense of our staffing to give
11 you a sense of you know a small but mighty team takes
12 in a lot of work. We're only able to achieve so much
13 because of our work in partnership with nonprofit
14 providers.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Sure, so for the record.
16 I'm so sorry, I just want to make sure I'm clear and
17 this is helpful because what we see in the budget
18 documents is that MOIA only has six full-time staff.
19 So, the 15, the 20, the 30, where are all these
20 people housed? So, if you would run through what are
21 the MOIA staffers that fall under your line item?

22 MANUEL CASTRO: Correct and I'll let Jasniya
23 breakdown the agency partnership lines but just to
24 say, this is something that uh, many mayoral offices
25 you know deal with.

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CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Sure, sure, sure.

MANUEL CASTRO: We have mayoral staff –

CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: I just want clarity, just clarity. So, are the three language service supervisors I'll call them, I'm sure that's not the correct term. Do they belong to your line item?

MANUEL CASTRO: I'll let Jas breakdown. I believe those are DCAS lines but I'll let Jas yeah–

CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay, let's start with the positions that belong specifically to MOIA and then I'd like to hear the breakdown of the positions that I are working under your purview but obviously distributed at different agencies.

JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Sure, thanks. Thank you for the question. So, historically, you know the way that our budget has been set up and continues to be set up is spread throughout three agencies. So, under the Mayor's Office, under DSS, as well as DCAS. And in all three of these agencies, we have both OTPS and PS that fall under our budget. So, our budget is spread out throughout these three agencies.

In terms of headcount, correct under the Mayor's Office, you see three lines. There under DSS, we have 11 lines. Under DCAS we have 43 lines.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Sorry, can you speak a
3 little louder into the mic. It might be me, old age.

4 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Can you hear me now?

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Yeah.

6 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Better?

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Yeah. Thank you.

8 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: So, Mayor's Office 6, DSS 11,
9 DCAS 43, 43 lines and then I just want to note you
10 know we do have a partnership also with RF CUNY and
11 we currently do have one line under RF CUNY. So, in
12 total we have 61 lines and again, these are you know
13 spread out.

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Across agencies?

15 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Yes but they do belong to MOIA.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it, okay that's very
17 helpful and in terms of the rows of the six staff
18 members, uhm that are under MOIAs prevue, direct
19 prevue, those are the legal supervisors? Can you
20 just run through those six?

21 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Uhm, so under the Mayor's
22 Office line, currently we have the Commissioners
23 line, our chief of staff, our Deputy Commissioner of
24 External Affairs, our Assistant Commissioner of
25 External Affairs, and our Director of Communications

1
2 and then the sixth line listed there, uhm, you know
3 is currently being utilized at another mayoral
4 office.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Great and so, for the uhm,
6 in terms of all the other positions, can you provide
7 us a budget with those positions and a cross walk.

8 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Sorry, I had it on mute. Uhm,
9 under the PS, give me one sec I can give you the
10 breakdown. For the Mayor's Office right, for those
11 six lines mentioned, for FY24 we're budgeted for
12 742,000, 786. For DSS for those lines, 11 lines,
13 we're budgeted for 904 and 88 and then for DCAS for
14 those 43 lines, we have two million nine hundred
15 thirty-six thousand and thirty-one dollars in PS.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Great and the CUNY position?

17 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Roughly you know because we had
18 to pay fees, admin fees. Roughly uhm, we're budgeted
19 for 126K for that line.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Great, thank you. In terms
21 of Commissioner, I'd like to thank you for being
22 specific in your testimony. Uhm, I'd love to hear, I
23 think the questions today just want to drill down on
24 much more specificity. You did mention a number of
25 different programs and certainly your advocacy around

1
2 TPS. Can you walk me through maybe the three
3 priority recommendations that your office has driven
4 that have been adopted and implemented by the city
5 and it could be in any agency.

6 MANUEL CASTRO: Good question.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: We can go back to it but I
8 would like specifically to understand policy is a
9 very significant part of your role here across
10 agencies. I would love to understand what specific
11 policies have you been able to implement as MOIA
12 across the city?

13 MANUEL CASTRO: Yeah, so I'm thinking through you
14 know the many instances we've advocated for policies.
15 I mentioned and I'd like to provide a number of
16 examples that I think are important to the current
17 enrollment we're in. So, uh, the first one and most
18 immediate is advocating for TPS as a position that
19 the city takes is quite important because as you may
20 be aware of, the asylum process is quite arduous and
21 it takes time for people to achieve work
22 authorization. Whereas with TPS, people are able to
23 access work authorization quicker.

24 I believe this is a core aspect of our advocacy
25 in the last year. We've met with a number of

1 individuals which we've communicated that it would be
2 helpful for them to advocate this with the White
3 House in the expansion of the Venezuelan TPS
4 redesignation of Venezuela TPS, I think was a
5 significant win for immigrant advocates and
6 communities and when you look at our role in
7 advocating for it, it was quite significant. Not
8 just with the Mayor's direct advocacy, my direct
9 advocacy, but also with our work with our coalition
10 partners across the country. And I mention this
11 because I am now advocating for us to advocate for
12 Ecuadorian TPS. And by extending TPS to Ecuadorians,
13 I think it would significantly impact recently
14 arrived immigrants to our cities.

16 Second, recently I've been working very closely
17 with our asylum seeker response leadership team.
18 MOIA will be taking on an increased role in building
19 the capacity of immigrant serving nonprofits,
20 especially those immigrant serving nonprofits that
21 have been working closely with nontraditional
22 populations, meaning informal workers, undocumented
23 workers and so forth.

24 I think pivoting to working closer with those
25 nonprofit providers and those community organizations

1
2 it's an important step for the city. It is now one
3 of our major pillars in our strategic plan and it's
4 something that MOIA will take an active leadership
5 in. Of course working with our multiple offices that
6 provide assistance to nonprofit organizations and so
7 forth.

8 And thirdly, uh, I will be Co-Chairing our
9 advocacy efforts, which again will become a pillar
10 that I think it's important for the City of New York
11 to establish which I've designed to establish a
12 communication strategy, legislative strategy, and a
13 coalition building strategy in order for us to more
14 effectively move us forward in our advocacy as a city
15 around the issue of asylum seekers in newly arrived
16 immigrants.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And is that advocacy
18 directed to the state and federal government or are
19 you talking about directed at our city and the way
20 our city is operating?

21 MANUEL CASTRO: Correct, particularly to the
22 federal government but certainly the state, I think
23 centralizing all our work around the advocacy that we
24 are conducting towards the federal government with an
25 emphasis on supporting recently arrived immigrants

1
2 and of course, the city is quite important and you
3 heard from our budget director yesterday, we were
4 awarded roughly \$150 million by the federal
5 government in support of this situation. We spend
6 much more than that, so.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And we haven't drawn down
8 not one third of it, so we have some operational
9 issues to address there.

10 MANUEL CASTRO: So, in terms of advocacy, I think
11 there's much more to be done for the federal
12 government to support our efforts and like I said, in
13 terms of legislative in action, the legislative work
14 by Congress and action by the White House, I think
15 it's important for us to really hone in on like what
16 we can be working on as a city government. And also,
17 coalition building; I think bringing communities
18 together to partner with and effectively advocate is
19 quite important. So I will say those three things
20 are very timely in something that I have been pushing
21 for and I think we've making progress on.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay, so in terms of the
23 direct services that MOIA provides, could you just
24 quickly tell me the direct services that MOIA

1
2 provides? And I know again, it was in your
3 testimony.

4 MANUEL CASTRO: Well, most of my testimony is on
5 the direct services that MOIA provides. Like I said,
6 it breaks down into these key areas that I described,
7 immigration legal services, English Learning and
8 support services but also internal work around
9 language access, which is quite important. I often
10 say that our role is really two-fold, external and
11 internal. Our internal work is obviously something
12 that most people don't get to see but it's quite
13 important. Uh, and we think of it as a service to
14 our sister agencies and offices.

15 But with respect to services to immigrant
16 communities, again it's limited in scope and it's not
17 something that is solely a responsibility of MOIA but
18 of also the government to be able to serve our
19 immigrant communities.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Right but for MOIA, the
21 direct services to immigrant community members is -

22 MANUEL CASTRO: Immigration legal.

23 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: It's legal.

24 MANUEL CASTRO: Immigration legal, English
25 Learning and we have general support services which

1
2 involve, Know Your Rights workshops for instance,
3 connecting and again, we do this mainly through
4 partnership with nonprofits, connecting for instance
5 dreamers to New York State dream back applications
6 and so forth, but that's the three pillars.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And the hotline.

8 MANUEL CASTRO: Correct.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Uhm, I'd like to recognize
10 we've been joined by Council Member Bottcher and
11 Council Member Joseph. Thank you for joining us.
12 Apologies. So, in terms of, I guess back to the
13 funding piece. What additional funding has MOIA
14 requested in this Fiscal Year and the out years?

15 MANUEL CASTRO: Well, we have yet to request
16 funding. We'll be in conversation around our needs
17 with OMB and with City Hall but as we engage in this
18 process, we'll continue to discuss with them our
19 specific needs and our work.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, can you tell me what
21 your needs are?

22 MANUEL CASTRO: Well, as I mentioned, we have a
23 variety of very specific programs aimed at immigrant
24 communities. It is not the sole responsibility of
25 MOIA to serve immigrant communities but these

1
2 programs we believe are very effective, specifically
3 at reaching the hardest to reach immigrant
4 communities. We are issuing an RFP and so forth, so
5 we are doing quite a lot with what we have and I
6 think it's important for us to highlight that this
7 work is effectively done in partnership with
8 nonprofits in uh -

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So what legal - I'm so sorry
10 Commissioner, I don't mean to be rude at all. I just
11 know we have very limited time and I'm not even past
12 my first page, so uhm, let's walk through it. In
13 terms of legal services, what additional funding does
14 MOIA need to meet the need?

15 MANUEL CASTRO: Well again if we're speaking
16 about meeting the need of serving the 1.13 million
17 non-citizens, that is not possible with the funding
18 that we have of course if the intent is to serve all
19 those who need it, right? We have very specific
20 funding that can serve a small portion of that
21 population.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Right.

23 MANUEL CASTRO: And uh, it's important for us to
24 target the funding to where it's most needed, so we
25

1
2 often serve folks who are low income, who are
3 unemployed, who live in specific -

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Do you have any sense of how
5 much you - obviously there's the moonshot. There's
6 everyone and I would love nothing more and I know you
7 would love nothing more but that's not the reality.
8 What is the stepped-up need that we would need to be
9 effective? What are you advocating for? We're in
10 budget season. There are no numbers anywhere to be
11 found. What is it that you need to step up to meet
12 even a full fraction? What is it that MOIAs
13 advocating for? How much money do you need to do the
14 most effective job that you can do in terms of
15 labeled services?

16 MANUEL CASTRO: Well again, we will be engaged in
17 conversation with OMB and City Hall about the needs
18 of the specific programs but I will say I've been a
19 long-time advocate for federal universal legal
20 representation. I asked -

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Right, we're in a city
22 Commissioner, we're in a city hearing around budget
23 and there are specific needs that I think we all
24 agree we have not been able to meet and we do have
25 budget constraints. Nevertheless, we have need,

1
2 right, an increased need. It would be great for the
3 public to understand what is MOIA advocating for in
4 terms of increasing that label need. We also know in
5 the context of legal services that we are not paying
6 properly for those services. They're undervalued and
7 so it would be nice to understand very concretely, I
8 know you're negotiating never the less, it would be
9 nice to understand. We are advocating this year for
10 \$50 million in legal services. We are advocating for
11 this amount for these services. These are the things
12 that we are pushing for and I can't seem to get an
13 actual concrete number from you. I don't know if
14 that's because you don't know it or you don't want to
15 put it on the table or you haven't quite decided and
16 I would just love for you to have the opportunity to
17 say, this is what we need. This is what we're
18 fighting for.

19 MANUEL CASTRO: So, generally, our office and
20 that's probably true for most mayoral offices that
21 our agencies don't come with a specific set of
22 numbers.

23 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: It's a problem. It's a
24 budget hearing, right?

25

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2 MANUEL CASTRO: Yes, we don't budget advocacy to
3 the budget hearings.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: To the budget hearings. I
5 understand that that's clear. Uhm, in terms of uh do
6 you have any outstanding requests to MOIA, to excuse
7 me, not to MOIA, yourself, to OMB.

8 MANUEL CASTRO: No.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Oh, okay. Uhm, can you tell
10 us where the funding for We Speak NYC is coming from
11 and is it housed under DYCD?

12 MANUEL CASTRO: I'll let Jasniya respond.

13 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Thank you for the question.
14 So, that funding is not housed under DYCD. The
15 funding is housed under our budget in DCAS.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, it's housed under DCAS?

17 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Yes.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And is this part of adult
19 literacy funding?

20 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Oh, excuse me, under DSS.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: DSS. You have a hard job
22 trying to track all these different agencies. Is
23 this funding part of the adult literacy funding?

24 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: It's not.
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay, separate and apart
3 okay. Uhm, has, well, I think I know the answer to
4 this. Has MOIA requested additional funding for
5 Action NYC?

6 MANUEL CASTRO: No.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: No, okay. Uhm, is there
8 dedicated staff to support legal services at the
9 agency level? If yes, how much is budgeted, is the
10 budgeted headcount and how many positions are funded?

11 MANUEL CASTRO: Jasniya will respond to that.

12 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: So, we work closely with our
13 you know partner agencies, especially those that run
14 legal services and again, I'll let Tom sort of talk
15 about more in terms of like how we collaborate with
16 them. But currently, we have three staffers,
17 including Tom that lead the legal services work in
18 our office as well as three vacancies under that
19 portfolio. And again, you know one of the things
20 that I would like to mention is that while that's the
21 case and it's a small team, right, you know we always
22 work across teams to be able to lead the work but I
23 can let Tom sort of talk about our, you know how we
24 collaborate with -

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2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And what the roles are that
3 are vacant currently.

4 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Uhm, Program Manager positions.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you.

6 TOM TORTORICI: Thank you Chair Avilés and
7 Commissioner Jas. So, within MOIAs Immigration Legal
8 Service Programs are housed Action NYC. The Action
9 NYC hotline, the Haitian Response Initiative, the
10 Immigrant Rights Workshop and the Rapid Response
11 Legal Collaborative, as well as the newly created
12 Asylum Seeker of Legal Assistance Network or ASLAN,
13 as the Commissioner described in his testimony.

14 They each involve interaction with various
15 agencies. Our primary partner is HRA and the Office
16 of Civil Justice who HRA holds the contracts within
17 their agency and we serve as programmatic manager and
18 that's the case across most, if not all of our
19 programs. MOIA takes the programmatic management
20 role and the agency provides contract and fiscal
21 support as well as acting as the vehicle for that
22 procurement.

23 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, is there an RFP or a
24 concept paper that's been issued for the immigrant
25

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2 legal services, such as Action NYC or the Immigrant
3 Opportunities Initiative?

4 TOM TORTORICI: I can't speak to the Immigrant
5 Opportunities Initiative, that sits under OCJ, the
6 Office of Civil Justice at HRA. MOIA did issue in
7 collaboration with HRA a concept paper for Action
8 NYC, renamed them YL Legal Support Centers Program in
9 last November and held a public information session
10 as well as receive public comment and question. We
11 can't discuss much about that procurement because
12 it's currently under way but any updates can be found
13 by the public and the city's passport system.
14 Organizations can register to view the status of that
15 procurement there.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: But in terms of the general
17 parameters of the program, could you walk us through
18 just the general parameters of the concept paper?

19 TOM TORTORICI: Sure, the MOIA legal support
20 centers program continues to prioritize community
21 rooted immigration legal services. Many of the same
22 services under Action NYC will be offered, including
23 application assistance and representation in both
24 straight forward and some complex immigration legal
25 cases. The model continues to prioritize the

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2 immigrant navigator approach of having individuals
3 who have the cultural and linguistic competencies to
4 be able to meet people where they are in their
5 community and provide them with legal services there.
6 It's a – the model prioritizes trust and centers the
7 client and our Action NYC providers over the course
8 of years have served tens of thousands of people in
9 this way.

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you. Did you receive
11 provider feedback on the concept paper and do you
12 have a sense of what that feedback was telling you?

13 TOM TORTORICI: Yes, our team has reviewed and is
14 actively considering all feedback received by the
15 public in the process and in the typical procurement
16 process, under HRA and most agencies, after the
17 release of the actual request for proposals or RFP,
18 there's another period during which the public can
19 submit questions and comments.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you. I'd like to
21 recognize Council Member Hanif. Council Member, I'm
22 happy to pause my questions if you are pressed for
23 time. No, okay, okay, thank you for joining us.

24

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2 Has MOIA met with legal professionals to hear
3 their concerns and advocate with the Administration
4 on their behalf?

5 TOM TORTORICI: MOIA is in regular contact with
6 our contracted immigration legal service providing
7 partners. We have regular calls with our Action NYC
8 partners as well as the individual contractors on the
9 regular course of program management, be it monthly
10 by monthly, whatever it might be.

11 In terms of the procurement however, we must be
12 extremely careful and adhere to the process that
13 exists under HRA and that includes minimizing or
14 eliminating any communication with public
15 organizations about the procurement while it's
16 happening.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Sure, but in terms of what
18 the advocate [INAUDIBLE 00:55:37] have relayed to
19 MOIA in terms of needs, are there any salient
20 responses that they have been providing to the agency
21 above and beyond what is happening in the procurement
22 that is important to note?

23 TOM TORTORICI: The feedback received to date is
24 being considered by MOIA. We can't quite -

25 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Oh, you can't, okay.

1
2 TOM TORTORICI: But later on in the process after
3 the release of the initial procurement, there is a
4 question and comment period during which MOIA will
5 respond. And I will say that during the course of
6 prior to the release of the concept paper,
7 Commissioner Castro visited many community-based
8 organizations within the communities as well. And
9 has taken their feedback into account in the
10 formation of this model and this approach.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it. I have definitely
12 seen Commissioner Castro out in many, many
13 communities. In terms of – can you tell us a little
14 bit about how MOIA manages Action NYC and the New
15 York Citizenship as well as the Rapid Response Legal
16 Collaborative?

17 MANUEL CASTRO: Go ahead Tom, sorry.

18 TOM TORTORICI: Management is fairly routine. We
19 make sure that invoices are received and paid on
20 time. We make sure that deliverables, including the
21 scope of work are met by the providers. Where not,
22 we provide feedback and support to ensure that they
23 can achieve deliverables and we offer any other type
24 of support. We also gather feedback through our
25 partners regarding city services and resources. As

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2 they interact with community members, often times
3 they'll flag that a certain service or resource is
4 not available and then we work internally to overcome
5 that barrier.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And has there ever been an
7 instance where corrective action was rendered in any
8 of these programs? And or changes in contract or
9 termination in contract?

10 TOM TORTORICI: In the current contracts, no.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Can you explain what the New
12 York City Citizenship Program is?

13 TOM TORTORICI: NY Citizenship is currently
14 housed under HRA. It's a program that provides
15 naturalization application assistance to immigrant
16 New Yorkers through a direct outreach model overseen
17 by the Office of Refugee and Immigrant Assistance at
18 HRA.

19 MANUEL CASTRO: And if I can add Tom, just to
20 clarify NYC Citizenship is not overseen by MOIA, that
21 has uh, the oversight and operations of this program
22 is now fully over at DSS.

23 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: At DSS.

24 MANUEL CASTRO: Just to clarify.
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you. Thank you. Uhm,
3 I'd like to pass it over to my colleague Council
4 Member Bottcher for questions.

5 MANUEL CASTRO: And Chair, if I may just clarify,
6 going back to your question as to whether we have
7 requested more funding, additional funding for Action
8 NYC, I responded no, which is true. Only because we
9 are in the beginning stages of discussions with OMB
10 with respect to our budget. As you know over the
11 last year, we have been trying to find savings and
12 undergoing through the PEG process. Again, the needs
13 are tremendous and will engage based on the guidance
14 we are provided by City Hall and OMB on how we go
15 about requesting and seeking additional funds. Thank
16 you.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Council Member Bottcher.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Thank you so much. I'd
19 love to give you the opportunity to talk about the
20 debit cards for asylum seekers. The pilot program to
21 distribute prepaid debit cards to asylum seekers so
22 they could purchase their own food at supermarkets,
23 bodegas, convenience stores, grocery stores. Has
24 this program started yet, the pilot program?

25 MANUEL CASTRO: Molly will respond to that.

1
2 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Thank you for that question.

3 So, it has not started yet but we expect it to start
4 in the next couple of weeks and we're really excited
5 because it allows us to really save some money and it
6 pilots something innovative to get money back into
7 local communities.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: There's a lot of
9 misinformation flying around about the program. One
10 of the pieces of misinformation that I hear a lot is
11 that these debit cards could be used anywhere. Tell
12 us about where they can and can't be used and what
13 restrictions are in place to prevent them from being
14 used where they shouldn't be used.

15 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, the way that the card works
16 is that it has certain restrictions of types of
17 vendors, so it only can be used in groceries, deli's
18 or bodegas. And so, specifically on food or baby
19 supplies or other supplies needed for kids or
20 pregnant individuals and so, and we make everybody
21 sign an affidavit and make everybody understand
22 exactly what they're for.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: If the card can't be
24 used in anywhere but those food service

1
2 establishments, is the affidavit just like an extra
3 step?

4 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yes, we want to make sure that
5 everyone understands what they're getting the card
6 for and what we expect when being into that program.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: So once the pilot
8 program starts, how long will it continue until you
9 make the determination whether or not it should be
10 expanded?

11 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we're going to be working
12 with our - with OMB. We're going to be working with
13 HPD. We're going to really be looking at the data to
14 see how it plays out, how the families are using it
15 and make decisions based on that. It is an initial
16 pilot of 500 households but we will continue to
17 monitor the data and see if we need to make any
18 adjustments.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Have you been consulted
20 on the criteria to select these 500 households?
21 Where were they be residing?

22 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, the families that we are
23 going to be picking are families in our HANAC
24 Program, which are families in hotel rooms throughout
25 the city in 28-day stays. This is because right now

1
2 they get deliveries from Dot Go. It will be cheaper
3 to do this and allow them to have some choice in what
4 kind of foods they want and allow them to buy the
5 supplies that they need.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: And the reason that
7 it's cheaper is because the food that you're having
8 delivered to these shelters is not being consumed
9 every day. Every day there is some that is not being
10 consumed and that's money wasted, right?

11 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, that parts of it. The
12 other part of it, these aren't shelters. These are
13 hotel rooms that people are in throughout the city
14 and therefore it's part of the cost of delivery. So,
15 we deliver food every three days. This will allow us
16 to not do that anymore and so the families will be
17 able to buy food for themselves in welcomed
18 communities.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: In your FY25 budget, do
20 you include any line items for this program?

21 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I have to get back to you on
22 that.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER BOTTCHEER: Okay. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Just to continue on just
25 quickly, why did the administration pursue this

1
2 through an emergency contract rather than bidding
3 out?

4 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Because we wanted to start
5 saving money as quickly as possible. I think every
6 type of model is different in this crisis. We are
7 running more than 216 sites and we have people
8 throughout the city and so, we're always looking to
9 do things more effectively and more efficiently and
10 try new innovative things out that can actually save
11 us money. And so, we wanted to get this onboard as
12 quickly as we possibly can to sort of, to get rid of
13 the delivery that we were doing.

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And there are claims that
15 the program will save the city \$7.2 million. Is that
16 true and based on what information?

17 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, right now we are estimating
18 that it will save us about \$600,000 a month. I would
19 have to defer to OMB about how that works out
20 exactly.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And does that mean the DACO
22 contracts are getting altered because isn't that
23 baked into the DACO contracts for food and delivery?
24
25

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2 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, right now DACO is doing the
3 delivery to the HANAC hotels so this would, if this
4 works out, this would replace the DACO deliveries

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, do we claw back that
6 money from those contracts?

7 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I'd have to get back to you on
8 that specific question but yes, we would save money
9 by doing this instead of something else.

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And in terms of, can you
11 speak to the track record of this company in
12 providing this kind of service? Has it been used in
13 the city before?

14 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, uhm, the city - so we are
15 constantly talking to hundreds of different vendors.
16 Uhm, this vendor has been talking to and a bunch of
17 city agencies. It also did work in other cities. It
18 went through an extensive vetting process by MOCs and
19 our legal controls. So, we stand by what they're
20 offering.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Right but they haven't
22 received - this is their first contract in New York
23 City?

24 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: This is their first contract in
25 New York City correct.

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2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay, I'd like to turn it
3 over to Council Member Joseph. Thank you.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you Chair.
5 Commissioner, always good to see you. Thank you for
6 the hard work but you know we can always do much,
7 much better for the immigrant community. So, I'm
8 interested about literacy. Was MOIA included in the
9 adult literacy RFP conversation?

10 MANUEL CASTRO: We have not participated. Like I
11 said earlier, the agencies are not required to
12 include us but we are certainly available to consult
13 with them as needed.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSPEH: How would they know to
15 cater this to the particular communities that we're
16 trying to target, if you're not part of the
17 conversation?

18 MANUEL CASTRO: I'm not sure how they went about
19 it but each agency has a process to do so. I have
20 offered to help disseminate the RFP and support as
21 needed.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And that's one of the
23 conversations I'm always saying, agencies should be
24 talking to each other so the delivery of services are
25 even much better. Can you speak about adult literacy

1
2 services at the HERRCs? One was a programming start
3 and which specific site and currently provide adult
4 education classes? How many do you have? How many
5 students you've already served?

6 MANUEL CASTRO: Yes, Molly can respond to that.

7 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So I have to get back to you on
8 the exact sites. We had five sites in '23 and we
9 have six sites now that are doing it through DYCD.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: You don't know how many
11 people you've served already?

12 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I'd have to get back to you on
13 those exact numbers and I also defer to DYCD on their

14 -

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay thank you. I have a
16 quick question around TPS. Uhm, so how many of the
17 countries have you served already? Do you have the
18 list of countries that are qualified for TPS?

19 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, I don't have the list with
20 me right now but anybody who walks into our Asylum
21 Application Help Center can get help for TPS because
22 we do a personal assessment of what that person needs
23 and decide if they're eligible for TPS. If they're
24 eligible for work authorization at that point or if

1
2 an asylum is the right pathway and if it makes sense
3 for them to.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: But is that the same rule
5 that applies for the humanitarian parole as well?

6 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: We also look at their
7 humanitarian parole paperwork and see if it makes
8 them eligible for expedited work pathways, correct.
9 And that all happens at our Asylum Application Help
10 Center and our three other satellites.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And how many have you
12 filed so far and from the 2023-2024 calendar year?

13 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: We have filed, our center has
14 filed more than 37,000 applications. And that also
15 includes things that are not TPS work authorization
16 or —

17 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: The I94.

18 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yeah, like we've done whatever
19 we can when we get people into that site to try to
20 figure out what makes the most sense for their
21 pathway.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And do you keep track and
23 how many have been successful to date?

24 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: We, we, people are not required
25 to come back to us and tell them. We're not doing

1 full representation. We're trying to get people set
2 up as quickly as we possibly can and make sure that
3 they hit their one-year asylum deadline. So, we're
4 not, this is all pro se and so, they're not required
5 to come back to us and tell them where they are. We
6 do know that someone came back and said that they got
7 asylum, which was really exciting for us. But that's
8 really about the relationship between the asylum
9 application helper and the client.
10

11 They are not required to tell us if they've
12 gotten asylum to this point. We do know that we've
13 been calling people back for work authorization and
14 we do know that more than 2,000 have gotten work
15 authorization at this point.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And do you also help them
17 to find employment?

18 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we work with SBS and we
19 refer anybody who's applied for work or has work
20 authorization. We refer them to SBS and the
21 Workforce One centers and we refer them to the State
22 Work Program and then we work with the state and our
23 SBS partners to call people back, do some job skills
24 assessment and then connect them to jobs as
25 available.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: How many have you
3 referred already?

4 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Uhm, we've referred about
5 10,000 people, probably more at this point. I have
6 to get back to you on the exact number to our state
7 partners and to our folks down state and SBS.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Uhm, how do you do your
9 outreach for communities to know that you have the
10 service whether they're eligible for humanitarian
11 parole or how do they get their TPS papers in order?
12 How are you doing the outreach?

13 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, the Asylum Application Help
14 Center and our satellites is really focused on the
15 people in our care. So, it's really focused on our
16 shelter residents, and so, that we do on site. So,
17 the second that you walk through our doors at our
18 arrival center, we ask a series of questions about
19 your legal status and about your paperwork so that we
20 know what pathway you're in and then we can - shelter
21 staff is able to connect you to these sites. My
22 colleagues and MOIA have the more - the broader
23 landscape of people not in our shelter system and
24 sort of connect them to legal support.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: How does the 30 to 60 day
3 enroll impact asylum seekers, I mean TPS recipients
4 and humanitarian parole? Chair just two more please.

5 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we have had more than 60
6 percent of people leave our shelters at this point
7 and we've also had a fair amount of people before the
8 30- and 60-day policies came into place. We try to
9 do everything we can while people are in our care and
10 connect them to whatever appointments we have. We
11 also tell people about change of addresses. We try
12 to make it as easy as possible to come get mail. So,
13 we try to make this as easy as possible while they
14 are in our care.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Yeah because immigration
16 wants a permanent address as to where folks get their
17 mail. They don't want to be chasing anybody down.
18 So, that's why I'm asking about the 30, 60-day rule.
19 That's why I'm asking for that. Thank you. Thank
20 you Chair.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you and then I'd like
22 to turn it over to Council Member Hanif. Oh and
23 we've been joined by Council Member Brewer.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you Chair Avilés and
25 welcome. I want to follow up about the debit cards.

1
2 So, these are for families in hotel rooms who are
3 staying for 28 days. Could you just clarify that?
4 They say per – their full duration at the shelter is
5 for 28 days.

6 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, this is a hotel room, yes
7 for 28-day stays.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: 28 day stays and then the
9 program for this debit card is for 500 families in
10 total?

11 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: 500 families in the pilot, yes.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: In the pilot and each of
13 them 28 days?

14 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Correct.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Correct, okay. And then
16 how did the \$600,000 savings come about? How was
17 that determined?

18 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Uhm, so you have to – I'd have
19 to come back to you and check with my colleagues at
20 OMB who helped us make these determinations.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And are other savings
22 being determined at this time?

23 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: We are constantly looking at
24 savings for food, for everything across the system.

1
2 I mean, we're working on a ten percent PEG at this
3 time and we've met our 20 percent PEG targets.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Got it. The PEG in the
5 preliminary budget released in January anticipated
6 spending on asylum seekers by 20 percent. The next
7 round of PEG cuts in February cut the budget an
8 additional 10 percent. We're talking now about
9 around \$2.5 billion. What specifically is causing
10 this decrease?

11 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Sorry, what decrease?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: The spending on asylum
13 seekers. So, I just described the PEG in the
14 preliminary budget in January, which was 20 percent
15 and then the next round in February an additional 10
16 percent.

17 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we worked really hard with
18 our colleagues at OMB, with our colleagues across the
19 system to reprocur some contracts. H+H reprocured a
20 bunch of their services to get better cost from
21 vendors. We reduced staffing in certain places where
22 we didn't necessarily need it and really to make sure
23 that more things were in line with our DHS sites and
24 we really focused on efficiencies across the system
25

1
2 to meet both our 20 percent PEG and we will see how
3 we meet our 10 percent PEG.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: How are you determining
5 these like staff efficiencies and the systemwide
6 changes?

7 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we want to ensure that
8 anybody who comes into any of our sites has the same
9 experience and has the same set of services, and so,
10 it's really making sure that all of our systems are
11 balanced.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And is that with like an
13 evaluation? Like what's being specifically done to
14 get that standardized?

15 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yeah, so it's a scalpel. It's
16 not a hacksaw. We are, we're looking at each
17 individual site and ensuring that we're getting
18 everything in the right order and that it makes sense
19 for that particular site because no two sites are the
20 same. You know, they might have different means of
21 egress. We might need one more fire guard here than
22 in another place but we're really taking a
23 comprehensive view of each site and what is needed
24 for that specific site.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Yeah, that's important
3 particularly with what we've been reading about some
4 providers and uhm, so definitely curious about how
5 specific providers are getting more streamlined or
6 standardized within the purview of the broader DHS or
7 OEM or the other agencies heading. If there is a
8 standardization, that is very important particularly
9 because many of the providers have not, to this
10 degree, to this scale managed migrants in this
11 population. In my district, we are opening a 400-bed
12 facility in the coming weeks and we had a community
13 forum just last night and lots of curiosity and
14 concern about this specific provider, having never
15 managed a population of 400 residents.

16 And so, how is the city managing or assessing and
17 then making the choice to go into business with
18 providers that have not managed and making that
19 choice to go into business with providers, new
20 providers such as the ones you're already doing
21 business with?

22 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, uhm, this is an
23 unprecedented emergency. We've never had this amount
24 of people coming into our shelter system at this
25 scale for this prolonged period of time. We really

1
2 are trying to focus on nonprofits and raising
3 nonprofit capacity. As Commissioner Castro said
4 earlier today, his teams is really taking a lead on
5 also helping us figure out how to build up capacity,
6 especially for those nonprofits that might work with
7 nontraditional populations but may not have the
8 capacity or the expertise to potentially house them
9 let's say and so, it's constantly a matching of what
10 are the providers who have capacity? What are the
11 providers who know how to do this, who have the
12 expertise? How do we match that and how do we help
13 both of those groups get to the point where they can
14 provide the best care for the individuals and what
15 kind of technical assistance can we provide to them?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Chair, I just want to ask
17 one set of questions. Could you provide a program
18 update on the city's legal service efforts for asylum
19 seekers? Would like to know specifically how many
20 TPS asylum and work authorization applications have
21 been filed so far. How many have been accepted,
22 rejected and how many are pending?

23 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, I can only talk about the
24 work that we have been doing in our Asylum
25 Application Help Center, which is you know something

1
2 that we are actively doing. Obviously, there's a lot
3 more work happening through ASLAN and the other
4 broader legal service provider networks. But through
5 our Asylum Application Help Centers, we've applied –
6 or we've filed more than 11,630 asylum applications,
7 more than 15,339 work authorization applications,
8 more than 10,745 TPS applications, and the total
9 across all of that is 37,714. Of those three
10 categories, we've also done other light touch legal
11 help there too. We've also been calling everyone
12 back whose applied for asylum more than six months
13 ago to see if we can get them in for work
14 authorization and we've been working with our federal
15 partners to both prioritize our packages but also
16 help file more efficiently the work authorization and
17 TPS applications.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And then how much money in
19 FY24 has been allocated to these efforts from the
20 city?

21 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, in the preliminary budget,
22 there was \$11 million. We are actively expanding.
23 The state has committed \$40 million but we are
24 working with them on that.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And how much is allocated
3 in FY25 Preliminary to these specific efforts?

4 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, in the preliminary budget
5 was \$11 million. I will give you an update on the
6 executive plan when we have it.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And then is there money
8 allocated for the continuation of the Asylum Seeker
9 Application Center and the satellite sites for blitz
10 clinic collaborations with the federal government?

11 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, that is part of our
12 satellite. One of our satellites is specifically the
13 federal clinic and we're really excited to figure out
14 how they can stay for asylum.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Great, thank you Chair.

16 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Okay, I'd like to recognize
17 Council Member Brewer.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much.
19 Yesterday with OMB there was a discussion about the
20 state giving you some money, giving the city some
21 money and I think 40 something has come in but
22 there's still more paperwork to be completed to get
23 the balance. Who is working on that? Because
24 apparently it's very complicated. Having done this
25

1
2 in the past myself for the previous mayor, I know
3 what's it's like but what's going on with that money?

4 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, I think you're talking
5 about the federal money -

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: No, this is state.

7 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So -

8 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: The governor - according
9 to OMB the governor gave I think it was 137 if I
10 remember correctly and 40 has been accounted for but
11 there's still more to fill out.

12 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, I'd have to get back to
13 you. I don't know about the state money.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Is there federal money?

15 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I think it's the federal money.

16 MANUEL CASTRO: It goes to the state.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: It goes to the state,
18 okay go ahead. What's going on? Why can't we fill
19 out those forms?

20 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, OMB is managing the
21 reimbursement with the state or sorry, with the
22 federal government there. I will say that they've
23 made - there is restrictive guidelines on how we draw
24 down that makes it harder for us, makes it harder for
25 other cities who have publicly said that its hard.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Chicago said that I
3 heard.

4 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Chicago and Portland also said
5 it and we've been talking to other cities who have
6 similar experiences, so we are working on it and we
7 are continuing to talk to the federal government
8 about ways to make it less restrictive.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, again, in some of
10 the for-profit. Do you know how many for-profits?
11 I'm not a big supporter I'll be honest with you,
12 whether it's Cherokee; is not my favorite as you
13 know. I know it's an MBWE but I would like to see
14 New York City nonprofits be doing the work. So how
15 many for-profits do you have? How many are not from
16 New York City doing this work?

17 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So I will get back to you -

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Cherokee is one of them,
19 I know.

20 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yeah, I have to get back to you
21 on the exact -

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: They don't have a
23 contract yet, so -

24 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: No, the exact numbers on that
25 but what I will say is that we hold the want to get

1
2 more nonprofits involved. The majority of our system
3 is currently nonprofits and we continue working
4 towards that goal.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know but I'm just
6 saying you keep giving more to some of these for-
7 profits. You'll let us know how many for-profits are
8 involved.

9 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I have to get back to you on
10 that.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And what the dollar
12 figures are? Okay. In terms of, I want to thank
13 Health and Hospitals because young people in school
14 have been staying in Manhattan if they are in a
15 Manhattan school and I want to thank you know credit
16 where credit is due. My concern is, okay so now 60
17 days, I'm still in Manhattan, I'm still at PS87 but
18 then I'm going to get another 60-day notice, I assume
19 from the next place I'm living. Can we cut that out
20 and just stop all the 60-day nonsense? Because A, I
21 don't think it's good for the families but also,
22 what's the cost? I did ask this of OMB. What's the
23 cost of keep this churning going?

24 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, at this point, 51 percent
25 of our families are leaving before the - either

1
2 before the 60th day or on the 60th day, so that means
3 49 percent are coming and reapplying for a shelter
4 system.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Some are coming back,
6 however, just so you know. They leave and then they
7 do call the school because I happen to know every
8 single you can imagine Manhattan family that has
9 called because they all call me and tell me. So,
10 they're coming back in some cases. Go ahead, so you
11 got 49 percent to house.

12 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yeah, but you know the stat
13 that I said includes the people who came back after a
14 couple of weeks. It includes - it came back to
15 shelter.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Oh, so you got 49
17 percent.

18 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: It's 49 percent who are still
19 in care now.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

21 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Uhm, I don't have the exact
22 numbers of what it costs to have people reapply but
23 we have the arrival center open 24/7. We actually
24 were able to reduce staffing there as part of our PEG
25

1
2 process and not change anything about operations and
3 so, that's where people are coming back.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay, I'm just saying,
5 can we not do the 60-day churning again? That's my
6 question. Is that something that's being considered?
7 Now you have your 49 percent. I don't think you're
8 going to get this big wave. I know you think you
9 might. Everybody has to worry, I got it. But
10 before, can we not plan not to have more churning?

11 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we plan in surges and
12 valleys as you -

13 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know, I could give a
14 speech.

15 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: And the border, we can't
16 control the border, we can't control inflow. The
17 only thing we can control are people when they are in
18 our sites and how we can help them figure out the
19 next steps for them and their families.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I know but we also have
21 to be thinking about good policy in my opinion.

22 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we need all the tools in
23 our toolbox. This is another tool in our toolbox and
24 we're continuing always to evaluate it and make data
25 driven decisions.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Alright, Dot Go, when is
3 their contract up? I never understand what the
4 contract you know, as you know I have been
5 criticizing them from day one. They know that. The
6 lobbyist calls me every minute. The question is
7 obviously you're saving money. I think that the
8 notion of having the debit cards is a good one but I
9 don't quite understand how it works in terms of Dot
10 Go not serving food at that location. So, when is
11 that contract up and what is the RFP opportunity for
12 whomever would take over?

13 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, there's not currently an
14 RFP on the streets but we are looking at ways to
15 improve our processes and that will include potential
16 RFP's for all the services in our shelters, depending
17 on which shelter and -

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, it could be forever
19 Dot Go basically? I'm asking?

20 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, uhm, the Dot Go contract is
21 not forever. I'd have to get back to you on the
22 exact date but there's a couple of different
23 contracts.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay and then just
25 finally, the issue of what goes on. We've got legal

1
2 services, OSHA, hopefully English Language. Some of
3 these dollars that we're saving, could they not go to
4 so that during the day, people have more
5 opportunities to take advantage of some of these
6 programs. And just so you know, I'm in the hotels
7 all day long and so is my staff. So, we know there's
8 not a lot going on.

9 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we would love more
10 opportunities to partner with you to get some of you
11 know discretionary dollars for OSHA training. We
12 want to - it's not just the city dollars that can go
13 to ESL workforce training. We also need philanthropy
14 dollars. We also need federal dollars. We also need
15 state dollars. I think we're working on all these
16 levers.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Take some of that Dot Go
18 money and use it for this. Take some that Dot Go
19 money and use it for some of these other
20 opportunities. Is that not possible?

21 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: We have to take into account
22 our entire budget. We're currently working on our
23 ten percent PEG and then we also are really looking
24 forward to figuring out ways to expand those programs
25

1
2 and make sure that we're giving people all the
3 supports they need while they're in our care.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you Madam Chair.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you Council Member
6 Brewer. I'm looking forward to seeing the \$600,000
7 savings on the Dot Go contract go away somehow. So,
8 we'd like to see that reduction. I'd like to
9 recognize Council Member Krishnan has joined us.
10 Council Member, do you want to? Okay, Council
11 Member.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you so much Chair
13 Avilés. Nice to see you all here too. Commissioner,
14 good to see you and thank you to your whole team as
15 well for all your great work. I know and think this
16 is really important with mentioning. Even before we
17 saw such a large increase of asylum seekers coming
18 here, the need for more support from this
19 Administration for immigration related legal
20 services, bilingual services, language access, and
21 resources for MOIA to continue that work has always
22 been crucial. And that need is only even more
23 exacerbated given what we're seeing now too.

24 But so, and that's why this budget hearing today
25 is very important because I think we're falling far

1 short from City Hall, this Administration, in
2 providing the supports for asylum seekers and
3 immigrants. Instead what we're seeing is them being
4 scapegoated and blamed as a reason to cut support
5 services that benefit not only asylum seekers but all
6 New Yorkers and that's really shocking to see and
7 also, just a false narrative that we shouldn't be
8 spreading.

9
10 I have a few questions in particular on some
11 programs related to that theme. One was in regards
12 to IDNYC. This is a program that's been crucial for
13 so many immigrant New Yorkers. Of course, my
14 district in Jackson Heights and Elmhurst, since the
15 very rollout of the program where my predecessor
16 Council Member Danny Dromm was one of the prime
17 sponsors on the bill and really pushed for, it's been
18 an incredibly beneficial program. In events that
19 we've done for asylum seekers, in resource fairs,
20 we've also really pushed and headed IDNYC there in
21 any way that we can incorporate them into our work.
22 But in the first four months of Fiscal 2024, IDNYC
23 cards issued decreased by 6,884 compared to the same
24 month in FY23.

1
2 The number of applications processed also
3 decreased in the first four months but this program
4 as I mentioned is the only opportunity for
5 undocumented New Yorkers to access photo ID. Yet,
6 HRA's budget for IDNYC is reduced by \$1 million in
7 the preliminary budget compared to the adopted budget
8 of FY24. Can you explain the reason for these
9 decreases?

10 MANUEL CASTRO: Thank you Council Member. I
11 really can't speak to the budget decreases. IDNYC is
12 now totally completely overseen by DSS. Our role is
13 really limited to supporting some of their outreach
14 work but you're right that this is a really critical
15 program for immigrant New Yorkers. As an advocate, I
16 worked to establish this program. Part of the reason
17 why MOIA is working closely with OASO but separately
18 is because we want to continue to reach out to those
19 longer-term immigrant New Yorkers who have had a
20 challenging time accessing IDNYC. So, we continue to
21 partner with DSS to do outreach in various
22 communities and ensure that they're connected with
23 the ID but again, I have to defer to my colleagues at
24 DSS on these questions.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: And what about the
3 delay and the inability for people to make
4 appointments? We've seen this with respect to other
5 public benefits as well. These benefits of these
6 programs are only as good as people have access – as
7 long as people have access to them. As with all the
8 laws and policies we create and it's particularly
9 true for immigrant communities in particular that not
10 creating accessible programs, making sure cuttings
11 with the bureaucracy is denying people the benefits
12 that they deserve and are entitled to.

13 And so, in this situation, what are the reasons
14 that people are unable to make appointments? Is it a
15 staff shortage? What is the shortage? Why is it
16 that it's been so difficult to get people access to
17 appointments for IDNYC?

18 MANUEL CASTRO: You know my understanding is the
19 search, the increase and the demand for IDNYC.
20 Again, I have to defer to my colleagues at DSS for
21 the technical reasons but what we've done as MOIA, we
22 partner with local community-based organizations to
23 establish office hours to come in and help nonprofit
24 members of these communities navigate the system and
25 successfully connect with IDNYC. Our outreach staff

1
2 is out throughout New York City trying to help people
3 navigate city services and this is primarily the one
4 that we assist with.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Does HRA bring you into
6 these conversations to coordinate strategy? Roll out
7 reducing delays funding? Is that something that you
8 all and HRA are in close coordination and
9 communication on?

10 MANUEL CASTRO: Not at the moment. As I said
11 earlier, agencies are not required to bring us into
12 these conversations. However, we're available and
13 happy to support as needed.

14 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: And I'll just say that we work
15 closely with them to ensure that people know about
16 New York City ID's in our shelter systems and that if
17 there's any misinformation about what it can be used
18 for, that we're helping people understand what it can
19 and cannot be used for.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you. That's a
21 problem and I think for the Administration to pride
22 itself on efficiency, one of the most basic ways to
23 increase efficiency is to actually increase
24 interagency communication, especially over a program
25 that so clearly is both under your jurisdiction and

1
2 HRA's regardless of whose technical jurisdiction it
3 falls under. I could be wrong but the impression
4 seems to be that the Administration has stopped
5 promoting IDNYC enrollment for all New Yorkers and
6 they just focused on using it for newly arrived
7 asylum seekers. What is the administration doing to
8 promote enrollment for long time immigrants living in
9 the city?

10 MANUEL CASTRO: Again, you know I'd have to defer
11 to my colleagues at DSS but what we've done in MOIA
12 is to ensure that we're reaching out to all our
13 immigrant communities and not just recently arrived
14 immigrants, which is why we set up different offices
15 to manage specifically the asylum seeker humanitarian
16 crisis response but we certainly work with a lot of
17 CBOs that serve longer term immigrant communities who
18 we've heard from that you know, we need to do better
19 at reaching out to longer term immigrant communities.

20 So, we've actively partnered with them to make
21 sure that we're reaching out to them.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Hmm, hmm, it's just you
23 know for all of the challenges here, to produce
24 funding as HRA has done in the preliminary budget, it
25 really runs in conflict with all of these intentions

1 and the important needs as far as this program goes.
2 If the Chair permits, I just have a couple more
3 questions if that's okay. One, it was just to make a
4 point. I think Council Member Brewer hit it before
5 too but really the chaos of the way in which families
6 are being transferred out of shelters because of the
7 60-day notice given to asylum seekers. The fact of
8 the matter is, it's just not a sustain- and I just
9 want to echo that point of how deeply shocking that
10 policy is because it is just a fact that when you are
11 forcing families out of shelter, not only is it so
12 destabilizing, already after the experience of
13 homelessness being destabilizing too but when you
14 force families out of shelter, especially when they
15 recently arrived as asylum seekers, it is no doubt
16 that children, their ability to go to school will be
17 incredibly disrupted. There's just no other way
18 around that because where they live is now influx
19 completely and their ability to get to school is now
20 entirely up in the air too.

22 So, I just wanted a very shocking and inhumane
23 policy and it needs to stop and I just wanted to echo
24 Council Member Brewer on that point as well. I don't
25 know why this Administration would issue such a

1 policy in the first place. The adverse impacts are
2 obvious. Uhm, my last question sorry, is about the
3 reduction in asylum seeker legal services. The
4 Asylum Seeker population like it needs to arrive in
5 our city, there's a great need for legal services.
6 And providing these services could enable many asylum
7 seekers to not only exit the shelter system but find
8 stable housing, which of course on one sense reduces
9 the cost to the city but in another sense too, will
10 allow them to secure jobs and increase both
11 economically and otherwise their contributions to the
12 city too.

14 So, all in all, from whatever perspective you
15 want, supporting asylum seekers rather than legal
16 services actually supports our city but the
17 preliminary plan did not include any funding in FY25
18 for asylum and work authorization applications and
19 other legal services compared to \$4.4 million that
20 was included in FY24. As a former legal services
21 lawyer, I know how important legal services are. As
22 a frontline of defense for so many individuals in
23 need of help, why was this funding included in FY24
24 only and why did the city not allocate a portion of

1
2 the asylum seeker funding to cover the growing need
3 for legal services?

4 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, the state has committed
5 some money for legal services and we're working with
6 them to actualize that and continue expanding our
7 legal services. So, we have at this point, as I
8 mentioned this before, filed more than 37,000
9 applications to at least get people on the pathway,
10 on their pathway for both work authorization and also
11 potentially citizenship. And so, we're continuing to
12 work with the state on that money and we're
13 continuing to see where that goes. And any updates
14 will be reflected in the executive budget.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: But the lack of funding
16 is what's most concerning because it's going to
17 inevitably have an impact on your ability to do that
18 work. My final question is just, how often does your
19 office meet with OASO and MOIA? How often do you all
20 meet to discuss legal services needs for asylum
21 seekers in particular and immigrant services in
22 general?

23 MANUEL CASTRO: We meet very often basically
24 every day. I mean we have a standing strategic
25 planning meeting Fridays but we are in constant

1
2 communication on a variety of different issues, not
3 just legal services.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER KRISHNAN: Thank you and thank you
5 Chair. Sorry for going over.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you so much. We're
7 going to take a quick pivot since we've already
8 started talking Ms. Schafer to OASO. Can you confirm
9 that this Committee has oversight over OASO?

10 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I don't know. I assume so but
11 I really don't know. I'm not a lawyer.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Do you commit to testifying
13 at this Committees Executive Budget hearing?

14 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I would have to talk to CLA and
15 our internal teams. I don't really have a budget but
16 happy to do whatever is needed.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Where is the offices
18 physical location?

19 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: 22 Reid Street.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Very happy answer. Can you
21 clarify OASOs responsibilities and how they differ
22 from MOIA?

23 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Absolutely. So, we were set up
24 to specifically focus on this humanitarian crisis.
25 As Commissioner Castro mentioned, they've

1 traditionally been more focused on immigrants across
2 the spectrum. As you mentioned 40 percent of the
3 population, there's a lot of needs. We were set up
4 to specifically coordinate, manage the operations of
5 responding to the rapid influx of people to make sure
6 we had the right shelter types to advocate for this
7 specific population to ensure, to build a long-term
8 strategy for the city to absorb people in this way.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And for the record, OASOs
10 current budget in Fiscal – what is OASOs current
11 budget in Fiscal 2024 and what is the spending
12 projection for Fiscal 2025 and the outyears.

13 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, currently in the
14 preliminary budget, we have a PS budget of \$1.7
15 million and ten lines.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: How many staff do you
17 currently have?

18 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Ten.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: That's right. That was in
20 your testimony and how many people will work for OASO
21 once the office is fully staffed.

22 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we're actually continuing
23 to work with OMB on that and we'll have an update in
24 the executive budget but we're expanding.
25

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2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Will OASO provide the
3 Council with an organizational chart and list of
4 personnel?

5 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Happy to follow up on that.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: OASO reports to the Mayor's
7 Chief of Staff, is that correct?

8 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: That is correct.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And how often do you meet
10 with the Mayor's Chief of Staff?

11 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: All the time. I think I have
12 at least every other day if not more.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Shouldn't OASO report to the
14 Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services similar to
15 MOIA?

16 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, the Deputy Mayor for Health
17 and Human Services is an active member of the
18 leadership team of this effort. We aligned it to
19 directly report to the Chief of Staff, so we had one
20 for the backend functions but she's an active member
21 of the leadership of this effort.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: I would imagine much of your
23 operational expertise is coming from the Deputy Mayor
24 of Health and Human Services. Does the Chief of
25

1
2 Staff, does the Mayor's Chief of Staff have expertise
3 in this kind of operation?

4 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Absolutely, the Chief of Staff
5 is a crisis management expert whose worked on all.
6 An operations expert whose worked on all levels of
7 government.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And is there a long-term
9 plan for OASO?

10 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: We're constantly working on it
11 to make sure that we are moving as the crisis moves.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Do you anticipate at long
13 term plan? It sounds like what I'm hearing is your
14 responding to the crisis but is there projected long-
15 term vision for what this office will or will not be?

16 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yeah, so we actually put out a
17 strategic plan last April, which started this office,
18 which was our road map. We will likely put another
19 one and we are constantly involved in strategic
20 planning and figuring out what the long term makes
21 sense but every month of this is different and so, we
22 have to take in those inputs to make sure we're doing
23 the best for New York City and its citizens.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And are you seeing any
25 duplication of effort?

1
2 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: No.

3 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: In terms of more
4 specifically in terms of how you work with MOIA?

5 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: No, because I think that we
6 both have a big piece of this puzzle but what we're
7 doing is working really closely together and making
8 sure that we're coordinating.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And how often are you
10 coordinating with MOIA?

11 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: All the time. I'm saying that
12 I meet with the Chief of Staff every other day. I
13 probably meet with their team every day or our team
14 does.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: In terms of uhm, the asylum
16 seeker crisis has shown the constant need for the
17 city to step up and deliver for immigrant community
18 and funding for immigrant services is housed under so
19 many agencies as we've discussed, which makes it
20 really challenging for our Council to capture the
21 overall investment in immigrant services. Has there
22 been any communication between OMB and MOIA on
23 creating a full agency for immigrant affairs? I
24 guess we're pivoting to you.
25

1
2 TOM TORTORICI: Uh, no there hasn't been. Not
3 since I joined the Administration.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Can I ask why not?

5 TOM TORTORICI: Uhm, I believe yeah, no, I don't
6 have a reason for that.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Uhm, for Ms. Schaeffer, do
8 you think there should be the creation of a full
9 agency of immigrant affairs?

10 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: What would be their purview
11 that's different than the purview now? I think we're
12 constantly thinking about how to do the long-term
13 asylum seeker operations better and figure out what
14 makes the most sense for the next couple of years,
15 three, five years and figure out what that actually
16 looks like.

17 So, if the idea is something that would subsume
18 this effort, there's lots of different ideas talked
19 about. There's lots of different models that we're
20 looking at to make sure that whatever the city
21 ultimately does makes the most sense for this crisis.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it. I have one clear
23 fact. 40 percent of the New York City population is
24 immigrants. It deserves a full agency that can
25 consolidate services and could make this less of a

1
2 run across multiple agencies where you have no
3 jurisdiction but you have partnership but they have
4 program. It's a little bit of a nightmare.

5 In terms of – let's pivot to the asylum
6 application help center. The I guess we see the
7 administration must really step up resources that can
8 be flexible and long term to meet the need for legal
9 services. Uhm, excuse me, to meet the legal services
10 in this current crisis and future crisis that are on
11 the horizon. As an example, TPS applications will
12 need renewal every 18 months, which you referred to
13 earlier and will require additional funding and
14 continued efforts in the future. OASO has limited
15 coordination with nonprofits but is asking for a lot
16 of support, like providing volunteers. What is the
17 current budget for the asylum seeker application help
18 center in fiscal 2024? And how much is projected to
19 be included in the executive budget?

20 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, as mentioned before \$11
21 million was included in the preliminary budget for
22 the asylum application help center. In our
23 satellites, the state has committed \$40 million.
24 We're working with that to realize that money and
25

1
2 working with them on their recommended budget and
3 what comes from that as well.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And how long is the \$40
5 million state funding expected for?

6 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Uhm, again, we're seeing what
7 they allocate as part of the state budget process and
8 then we will figure out what we can do.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And in terms of uhm, are you
10 expecting the \$11 million to be included in the
11 executive budget?

12 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I would have to defer to my
13 colleagues at OMB on that one.

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: How long is the contract at
15 the Red Cross Center.

16 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I'd have to get back to you
17 exactly on that.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And are folks subject to the
19 30, 60-day rule when using the Red Cross Center as
20 their address with USCIS?

21 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, uhm, I have to get back if
22 we started doing that exact for people who fill up
23 their applications. We have four satellite sites, so
24 it's not just at the Red Cross. Or sorry, we have
25 four sites, so it's not just at the Red Cross where

1
2 we do our services but we have been developing a plan
3 to keep important mail at sites indefinitely.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, you're keeping mail
5 indefinitely at those sites?

6 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: We are almost 100 percent there
7 throughout our system.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: What do you mean throughout
9 the system?

10 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Throughout the sheltering
11 system.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, are you saying that
13 every shelter is going to indefinitely keep mail for
14 people who are in them at that site?

15 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Important mail, so specifically
16 important mail.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And how does one determine
18 what's important when you can only see where it's
19 coming from?

20 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we have - we've broken down
21 what kinds of things. So, it's Social Security
22 Cards. It's work permits. It's anything from the
23 federal government. So, we have a whole list of
24 things that people that will be kept indefinitely.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, when do you expect to
3 role that out?

4 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we've already rolled it out
5 in most of our sites, so we're just working for the
6 next couple of weeks to get it at the rest of our
7 sites.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, would you say as of
9 today, all mail will be permanently kept at sites,
10 shelter sites?

11 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I will not say as of today, in
12 the couple of weeks.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Next couple of weeks, you're
14 expected to be 100 percent and it will be held
15 indefinitely at those sites and as people are moving
16 because of the 30, 60 rule, they're going to be told
17 they can go back to their former site?

18 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Hmm, hmm.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay, uhm, what data and I
20 think apologies, I think you mentioned this earlier
21 but I wanted to make sure we have it, what data is
22 being collected on the Asylum Application Help
23 Center?

24 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, it's the applications.
25 We're also collecting like what we accomplish. Some

1
2 general information about the individual so that we
3 can get back in touch with them at certain key points
4 to try to invite them to do other things. So, for
5 instance, with folks who have applied for asylum, six
6 months later, we can call them. We can get them in
7 if they've gotten their biometrics done to fill out
8 their work authorization.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And who has access to this
10 data?

11 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Uhm, it's very uhm protected
12 information, because obviously it's immigration data.
13 Uhm, we do not keep completed applications. We were
14 very clear at that in the very beginning. We don't
15 keep completed applications but we uhm, the data is
16 utilized and seen by a select few people.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay, how many attorneys are
18 currently operating on the site?

19 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I'd have to get back to you on
20 the breakdown of attorney's but we have 125
21 application assistance and attorneys and
22 interpreters.

23 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, 125 application
24 assistance -

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2 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Attorney's and interpreters and
3 I have to get back to you on the breakdown at
4 specifically the Red Cross.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Of these attorneys, how many
6 does OASO fund?

7 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, this is funded through a
8 contract through On Call Council and we also have
9 some pro bono firms.

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And are many of these
11 attorneys from for-profit organizations, are being
12 paid or is -

13 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Obviously there's folks doing
14 pro bono but we are paying some of the immigration
15 attorney's. Some of them might have their own law
16 firms but we have a panel of people who reviews each
17 application, especially for the immigration
18 attorney's.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Go it. Uhm, I guess if you
20 could provide the breakdown for us, that would be
21 helpful. What was the result of the recent
22 engagement of universities with NYU, Columbia and
23 Baruch among others at the Asylum Application Help
24 Center.

1
2 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I'm sorry, I just actually got
3 an update. It's 120 application assistance and 25
4 lawyers is the breakdown, so it's actually a little
5 more than I had in my paperwork.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: 25 lawyers and 100
7 assistants.

8 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Uhm, I'm sorry, I just actually
9 got an update. It's 120 application assistance and
10 25 lawyers is the breakdown, so it's actually a
11 little more than I had in my paperwork.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: 25 lawyers and 100
13 assistants?

14 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yup. Uhm, so we actually have
15 a couple of smaller uhm satellites. I think we have
16 I have to get back to you on exactly who but I think
17 there's two smaller satellites at those schools,
18 which is really exciting.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And is there plans to
20 continue the programming? Do you have a sense of
21 when you say smaller, what does that mean?

22 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: They're just doing less
23 applications than we're doing in our bigger sites.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And what's the volume for
25 those more or less?

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2 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I'd have to get back to you.

3 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay. Are you hoping to
4 continue or expand this type of programming?

5 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Absolutely and we're constantly
6 looking at what's the next phase of this and what
7 makes sense as we take into account the fact that
8 people need long term representation and working with
9 our colleagues and MOIA to figure out what's the
10 right balance of immediate stabilization if you will
11 of legal and long-term support.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it and I have to ask
13 this again because we've received very interesting,
14 conflicting information. Does your office meet with
15 MOIA to discuss legal service needs for asylum
16 seekers?

17 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yes, we do.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And does OASO coordinate
19 with nonprofit organizations on recruiting volunteers
20 to assist with the massive need of the applications?

21 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we've had a couple meetings
22 with legal nonprofits who are doing this work to
23 ensure we're hearing from them and hearing their
24 concerns and coordinating.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: What are some of the
3 concerns that you're hearing from the legal
4 nonprofits?

5 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I mean, I think it really comes
6 down to this idea of representation versus pro se
7 help. Again, we're really doing this short-term
8 stabilization to get everybody's clock started and to
9 really get them on the pathway, especially because we
10 know when we started even that the capacity of
11 everybody was so limited with so many people coming
12 into the city, that we needed to figure out something
13 high volume, low touch that we could do quickly to
14 get people on the right path and then figure out what
15 we do to uhm, adequately source the field or sorry,
16 adequately resource the field.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Right, in terms of what
18 we've heard from nonprofit legal service providers is
19 that the RFP that the Administration is putting out,
20 have unrealistic deliverables for the amount of
21 funding available. And many attorneys are not
22 applying for that. What is your response to that?
23 Because I'm sure you have heard it directly as well.

24 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we don't, it's not our RFP
25 that has to do with MOIAS RFP.

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2 MANUEL CASTRO: Yeah, if I can respond. We can't
3 speak to what will be in the RFP because that process
4 hasn't been completed but I can hand it over to Tom
5 to speak generally about our approach to this work.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Or how has MOIA responded to
7 this critique of deliverables that do not make sense
8 and a lack of funding?

9 MANUEL CASTRO: Well, before I hand it over to
10 Tom, you know there's a distinction between the
11 concept paper that was published in the RFP. We
12 wanted to gather comments based on the concept paper,
13 so again, you know we're taking those comments into
14 consideration. It was important for us to follow the
15 guidelines provided by DSS to receive feedback from
16 the public but I'll hand it over to Tom.

17 TOM TORTORICI: Thanks Commissioner. Thanks
18 Chair. Just to repeat, we issued a concept paper
19 with the intention of drawing out community nonprofit
20 potential vendor feedback. We've received a great
21 deal of that. We're currently developing the first
22 draft of the RFP as the Commissioner mentioned. The
23 concept paper isn't necessarily what will be in the
24 RFP but we can speak to the process or to what the
25

1
2 eventual deliverables or structure of that program
3 will be.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Uhm, I know we're in this
5 weird moment of somethings we can't fully discuss but
6 we've been informed that it looks like hourly rates
7 that are posted for for-profit providers are
8 significantly higher than what they're offering
9 nonprofit providers. What's up with that?

10 TOM TORTORICI: I would defer to Molly regarding
11 the help center.

12 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So on call Council, which is
13 the temp lawyer firm which we use to staff the asylum
14 seeker help clinic. We at the time wanted to make
15 sure that we could get as many people onboarded as
16 quickly as possible. We did in effort to save cost
17 and lower some of those salaries a couple months ago
18 and we're again constantly looking at how to do this
19 better and different but again, we wanted to set - we
20 had a mandate, which was our collective mandate to
21 get as many people this kind of support as quickly as
22 possible and so we at the time, tried to source it so
23 that we could get as many lawyers as quickly as
24 possible.

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2 TOM TORTORICI: And just to build on that, I
3 think what you're seeing is you know in order to
4 respond in an emergency when professional capacity in
5 a field is limited, often times it will require
6 higher pay or a premium of sorts. MOIA's purview is
7 building the capacity of the field over time and
8 ensuring that small community-based organizations are
9 appropriately resourced and those community-based
10 organizations that don't necessarily have or offer
11 legal services are able to build them over time. So,
12 it's building the professional capacity of the field
13 longer term.

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Yeah, but I got to say,
15 that's completely disregarding. A good number of
16 institutions with very deep expertise in the city of
17 providing legal services over a very long period of
18 time and some would argue a more effective legal
19 representation for these cases, certainly culturally
20 competent.

21 So, having I understand the need to scale up very
22 quickly but this consistent message that this
23 Administration sends that it would pay double to
24 corporations and corporate entities and private
25 entities and continue to devalue its nonprofit

1
2 counterparts who are here, good, bad and ugly, is the
3 message that we seem to be receiving with these
4 consistent disparities in how contracts are awarded
5 and the values. We're seeing this over and over
6 again. Obviously not simply in MOIA but in this
7 entire space, we are seeing a prioritization of
8 corporations and profit for corporations and not our
9 nonprofit competent partners who have been here.

10 And I agree that there is work to be done in
11 terms of building capacity of smaller providers but
12 we have an incredible network here with very reach
13 and expertise who is being nickeled and dimed while
14 we're paying private attorneys much more money.

15 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Can I just actually just one
16 point on that? It's a temp firm that hires the
17 lawyers on our behalf so a lot of the folks that we
18 have in our sites are nonprofit lawyers. They work
19 for nonprofits and they work for us. It's a lot -
20 it's about the individual. It's not necessarily
21 about the company. I hear about your point though,
22 which is a point well taken and it is something that
23 we are as we look to a long-term strategy for this,
24 we are actively looking on how to make the field more
25 able to respond in this way.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, in terms of is there any
3 plan to increase the legal services in Fiscal '25 to
4 meet the 150 million Fiscal '25 funding requests from
5 legal professionals?

6 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I mean, we're currently
7 expanding our work through the state and I defer to
8 MOIA on the other.

9 MANUEL CASTRO: Yeah, it's current— it's not
10 something that's in our preliminary budget. Again,
11 we're at the beginning stages of this process. We'll
12 certainly you know continue to work with City Hall
13 and OMB on this but I did want to give Tom an
14 opportunity to talk about ASLAN, which I spoke about
15 earlier and also mention that it speaks to one of
16 your earlier questions, we've in the last couple of
17 months, I think we've had many good discussions
18 around our desire to move away from these for-profit
19 contractors to working closer with our nonprofit
20 vendors.

21 Again, you know the short-term strategy required
22 us to work in such a way that we had to rely on this
23 temp agency. But ASLAN I think is a good model that
24 we can look to to working in expanding capacity of
25 our non-profit providers in partnership with the City

1
2 University of New York. So Tom if you want to speak
3 to that.

4 TOM TORTORICI: Thank you Commissioner and as the
5 Commissioner said, that's been the intention of MOIA
6 and the Asylum Seeker Legal Assistance Network since
7 inception. In the past year, the collection of
8 organizations that make up that initiative have held
9 43 clinics serving 756 newly arrived migrants and
10 asylum seekers who arrived on or after January 1,
11 2022. There's no requirement that they actively live
12 in shelter, so it's a broader population. And the
13 services they provide are also broader. They serve
14 individuals with pro se application assistance, TPS
15 application assistance, work authorization
16 application assistance. They also provide guidance
17 with respect to representing themselves in court.
18 Given that representation is very low field wide,
19 they help folks with changes of venue and changes of
20 address, all the things necessary to ensure success
21 in the case to the extent possible.

22 They also provide training sessions; more than
23 8,000 people have received training and informational
24 sessions from asylum partners. This is further
25 building the capacity of the field. Many of the

1
2 individuals participating in those sessions were
3 asylum seekers themselves, learning how to navigate
4 their own case. Many thousands of others were
5 frontline workers. Community based organization
6 staff, volunteers who are working to assist asylum
7 seekers even shelter staff, so that they are more
8 aware of the sort of paperwork people are presenting
9 with and not providing legal advice but helping to
10 orient people to the appropriate resources and
11 information. So, it's a holistic approach, community
12 rooted, driven by nonprofits and we're proud of
13 everything that our partners under that initiative
14 have accomplished to date.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And remind me again what's
16 the line item for this program? What's the budget
17 for asylum?

18 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: I would have to defer to
19 [INAUDIBLE 02:05:45] to how it's listed but for this
20 initiative, we were allotted \$5 million spread
21 throughout FY23 and FY24.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And are you expecting to
23 continue the same funding level in this coming year?
24
25

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2 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: We'll continue to have
3 conversations with OMB on this. As the Commissioner
4 mentioned, we're in that process.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: I forget, we can't answer
6 budget questions. Uhm, in terms of Ms. Schaeffer,
7 you mentioned definitely drawing down money, the \$40
8 million from the state. What's the advocacy or
9 funding requests from the federal government in terms
10 of legal services in particular?

11 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we are constantly working
12 with the federal government and pushing them for more
13 money and pushing them also to help us on the legal
14 side because we're also doing a lot of advocacy on
15 making the process better. And I mean, as the
16 Commissioner mentioned, TPS for Venezuelans was huge
17 and their federal clinic on site with us being able
18 to give someone their receipt notice on site was also
19 really big, and so, we continue to work with them on
20 that and making the process a little bit more
21 streamlined and easier for the actual applicant on
22 the pro se side has been a really big part of our
23 advocacy, while we have their buy in here.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Is there an actual amount
25 that we've been requesting for funding from the

1
2 federal government, related specifically to legal
3 services?

4 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I'd have to get back to you on
5 any specifics around that.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And have there been
7 conversations with OMB on increasing immigration
8 legal services in the executive budget?

9 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: We are constantly in
10 communication with OMB. We're constantly in
11 communication with the state on increasing our
12 funding around legal services because we're expanding
13 and we continue to spend.

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Uhm, what has collaboration
15 looked like between the help center and the legal
16 service nonprofit providers?

17 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we've had, as I mentioned,
18 we've had a couple of round table meetings. We've
19 also had a lot of nonprofit staff who actually are
20 working with us. We also at Red Cross, was also some
21 of the legal providers doing their own clinic, their
22 pro se clinic, so we've had lots of different
23 opportunities to talk and figure out how to do best
24 by our clients and you know, they've brought some
25 suggestions on how we can do things better. We've

1
2 brought some of their suggestions on how to make the
3 process better to the federal government to try to
4 get those process improvements.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: You anticipated my next
6 question. Could you color a little bit more around
7 what some of the improvements, recommendations you've
8 received from nonprofits?

9 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yeah, I think we all
10 collectively want to make the ability to actually
11 apply online for everybody regardless if they need a
12 fee waiver or not. That's one of our biggest ones.
13 Getting rid of the fees would be probably a really
14 big boon for everybody, simple things, like not
15 requiring a two-hole punch for a pro se application
16 would be a really big deal. Uhm, and we've really
17 pushed on that one. But there is - it sort of runs
18 the gamut, I'm happy to share our specific asks
19 because we've again talked to the legal providers and
20 we've done just based on our own - I would like to
21 call it expertise at this point on pro se
22 applications. We've been able to kind of create a
23 list that we constantly work with the federal
24 government on.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: What resources does OASO
3 make available for providers engaged in this work?

4 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we don't have any contracts
5 and we don't have an OTPS budget and therefore we
6 make no resources available but what we do is
7 coordinate on what agencies could potentially make
8 available and the philanthropy community.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it and in terms of, can
10 providers utilize the space at the Help Center?

11 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we actually in our federal
12 clinic, which is the only of our sites that actually
13 has space right now, it's at John Jay. We had two
14 different providers come in and be able to apply
15 their clients in the federal government process too,
16 so we've made that space available to them to be able
17 to utilize the federal government being there to get
18 faster receipt notices.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: But at the other centers,
20 they cannot?

21 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: At the other centers, they
22 can't because we just don't have any space at the
23 other centers.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it.
25

1
2 MANUEL CASTRO: I just want to mention that
3 through ASLAN, which Tom just described, we just
4 opened a space, a physical space where nonprofit
5 providers with ASLAN are working from.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And where is that space?

7 TOM TORTORICI: 413 East 120th in East Harlem.
8 Appointments can be made through the asylum seeker
9 research navigation sites as well as the Action NYC
10 hotline or the MOIA legal support hotline.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Great thank you.

12 TOM TORTORICI: I just want to clarify one point
13 because sometimes language makes it a little weird
14 right to understand it. So, our navigation sites,
15 we're established in partnership with catholic
16 charities and nonprofit organizations. Initially we
17 call them satellite sites to our navigation site.
18 There's some confusion there. There's also satellite
19 sites to the application help center but these – what
20 we used to call satellite sites, now they're called
21 navigation sites, our nonprofit organizations spread
22 throughout New York City that connect to ASLAN and
23 other services that we coordinate. And so, there's
24 some overlap here where there's asylum seeker
25 support. The only difference is that we support

1
2 asylum seekers who are not just under our care but
3 already living in our communities.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it. Thank you. Thank
5 you for the clarity and the decoding on all the
6 services. I'll continue to need more guidance. In
7 terms of one of the critiques I've heard of actually
8 staff at the help center has been that over the
9 progression of time, they saw quality being eroded
10 for quantity. And we know asylum applications
11 generally take a long time.

12 The other critique I've heard is that the
13 dependents on language line is deplorable and with
14 such a sensitive topic as the topics that are
15 discussed in that application that it's just a real
16 serious problem. How do you ensure that quality
17 remains the principal driving motivator as opposed to
18 quantity and how do you respond to those critiques?

19 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Thank you for bringing those up.
20 Obviously if there's any specific concerns about
21 certain applications, we're always happy to take
22 feedback because we know how important these
23 applications are. Uhm, so we have made it a priority
24 through On Call Council to get bilingual staff and to
25 get bilingual staff in certain languages that are

1 less common. We do use language line when we don't
2 have someone who is available at that time who speaks
3 that language so that we can continue doing the work
4 but it is something that we've prioritized, just
5 making sure that we can try to get more and more
6 bilingual staff to be able to help and more because
7 we know how important it is to be able to have that
8 conversation with someone who understands your
9 language and especially these conversations.
10

11 So, 100 percent we are aligned there. You know
12 some of the languages are harder to get bilingual
13 staff than others, especially it also depends on who
14 applies and we you know continue to send out that
15 application everywhere.

16 To the second question about quality, quality is
17 underpinning everything that we do. Uhm, we you know
18 after TPS was announced, we transitioned a little bit
19 more of our time and energy to TPS just so that we
20 can get it done as quickly as possible and then
21 transition back to asylum. But we have a stepwise
22 process where you have the asylum application, the
23 application assistance. Then you have immigration
24 attorneys that look over their work and it's more
25

1
2 than one and then you also have the mailroom person
3 at the end of the day that does another look.

4 So, we have multiple checks in place. We have
5 heard back for EIR, from DOJ about the quality of our
6 applications but again, if you're hearing anything in
7 particular, we're always happy to look into it. You
8 know quality is really the underpinning of what we're
9 doing.

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: No, thank you for that.

11 What I was hearing was that the mandate is to
12 complete the application in one sitting hell or high
13 water. I don't know what the result of that looks
14 like, if you're receiving on the backend any kind of
15 guidance if that's materializing but a discomfort
16 around ramming through an application in one sitting,
17 which we know in a regular setting would take months
18 if not weeks because the matters are so sensitive and
19 traumatizing quite frankly. So, yeah, it sounds like
20 you definitely have obviously multiple layers there.
21 I don't know what feedback you've been receiving but
22 having all these applications done, is that a
23 mandate? Are they supposed to be done in one sitting
24 and that's it?

1
2 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: No, it takes however long it
3 takes.

4 MANUEL CASTRO: Chair, if I can speak to the
5 language access. I think this is one of the ways
6 that we can speak to the responsiveness of our
7 language access team. We also heard feedback around
8 the language line and language access needs at the
9 application center and at the HERRCs. We deployed
10 our staff once we were able to hire them, deploy them
11 to help the teams there develop language access plans
12 and address some of the issues that we were seeing as
13 more languages of limited deficient became present at
14 these locations.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And in terms of you
16 mentioned that folks received six-month call backs.
17 How successful are those call backs? Are you able to
18 track how successful that has been?

19 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, it's been complicated
20 because if you don't do your biometrics appointment,
21 then your clock stops. And so, we've been seeing
22 that it's a really complicated process with the
23 federal government and so, we're really trying to
24 again use every lever we can to get that process to
25

1
2 be a little bit better so that we can serve people
3 more efficiently.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, but in terms of the and
5 forgive me, I may not have as much nuance here but
6 how are you keeping track of all the potential places
7 of divergence here or rather, do you keep tracks of
8 the metrics? Like we did 11,000 applications, 30
9 percent of them we have been able to maintain full
10 contact and we would consider that a fully
11 successful. Do you have those kinds of metrics
12 around how you're following these various
13 applications and where the points of diversion or
14 failure are?

15 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we do have numbers on the
16 amount of people that we've called back and if we've
17 been able to get them. I do not have those numbers
18 with me and so, I'm happy to follow up on that but
19 that is something that we are looking at but again,
20 like our site was only open last summer, so we're in
21 the starting phases of that six-month clock anyway.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Sure, thank you. We'd love
23 to receive as much data around where the various
24 points of failure and changes are in the system
25 because again, we're investing and making sure we're

1
2 doing right and if there are multiple points of
3 failure we're not able to address, we're simply kind
4 of throwing good money after bad. And could be you
5 know, have implications for people's lives, so thank
6 you. We'll talk more.

7 So, just moving on really quickly, in terms of
8 transportation, uhm, it's been really troubling that
9 last year in 2023, the city did not cover any of
10 these costs forcing grassroots organizations like TLC
11 or artists and athletes and activists to step up and
12 cover cost out of pocket. Which agency covers cost
13 related to reticketing?

14 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Uhm, so each agency has a
15 reticketing option uhm in each of the shelters. We
16 also have reticketing at the arrival center, so we
17 have it throughout our system.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And can you provide us a
19 status with the update of the city's current spending
20 for reticketing?

21 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, as of 1/31/24, we had
22 purchased 28,568 tickets. The amount spent was \$7.6
23 million, around and that was largely due to the
24 increase in tickets to destinations outside of the
25 U.S..

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Airline companies must be
3 real happy.

4 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: What?

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Airline companies must be
6 real happy with New York City.

7 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Some of its bus tickets. Some
8 of its land travel. It's not just airlines.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Fair enough. Fair enough.
10 Which providers, have any providers been
11 reimbursed for reticketing?

12 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, the groups that we have
13 doing the reticketing have been reimbursed for it.

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, there's no outstanding
15 invoices as far as reticketing is concerned as far as
16 you know?

17 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I'd have to get back to you on
18 that.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay. I knock my socks off
20 to learn that New York City owes NYLAG \$6 million and
21 still requires so much service from the entities, so
22 I'm glad to hear there's no outstanding balances
23 here.

24 In terms of the help uh, let me just take a -
25 we're going to pivot really quickly to the debit

1
2 cards again. Uhm, the math isn't quite math-ing, so
3 we're doing a pilot for 500 families, \$1,000 a month
4 and how long do we anticipate that pilot going on
5 for?

6 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: That pilot will be until - so,
7 always mentioned, we don't control what happens at
8 the border, so it's really about new families that
9 come in and get placed in HANAC hotels. And so, that
10 pilot will take us as long as it takes to put people
11 in those rooms.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: But for 500 families, \$53
13 million dollars?

14 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: It's not for that \$53 million.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Oh no, it's not. What's the
16 correct number?

17 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Uhm, I don't have the exact
18 amount. We can get back to you on that but the 500-
19 family pilot is not \$53 million.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: But the contract, I reviewed
21 the contract. The total contract is \$53 million and
22 the amount of money I think was \$50 million at \$3
23 million in administrative costs.

24

25

1
2 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: And not to exceed, so that's
3 the full value of the contract, right? So, we can
4 use whatever we need out of it.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, we anticipate a pilot to
6 run as long as?

7 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: It takes to fill the rooms.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: To use all \$50 million?

9 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: No, until we get to 500
10 households.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: That's a really large up to
12 amount for 500 households, right? Because that would
13 be \$500,000. There's a big difference between
14 reaching \$500,000 for a household. Excuse me, I'm
15 using the wrong words, and a \$50 million gap.

16 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: But it allows us the
17 flexibility to expand if we like what we see.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: That's a big gamble.

19 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: But we are not -

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: I'll the Admin a good place
21 to put some clear money would be in adult literacy.
22 Uhm, okay that's wild. Uhm, alright, in terms of
23 uhm, let's see, we have so many questions. Thank you
24 for your patience and being here.

1
2 In terms of adult literacy, uhm, I think
3 Commissioner, you said that MOIA was not included in
4 the adult literacy RFP conversation, is that correct?

5 MANUEL CASTRO: That's correct.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Ms. Schaeffer, was your
7 office consulted in the adult literacy RFP contract?
8 Neither, okay.

9 Alright, in terms of, oh let's see... So many
10 things... I know we have to talk to DYCD around adult
11 literacy because that math doesn't add up either.

12 MANUEL CASTRO: I would just add that we do meet
13 with Commissioner Howard and his team to discuss
14 issues relating to immigrants and immigration quite
15 often. We just held an immigrant media roundtable
16 with him to promote programs that they manage. In
17 terms of being part of the RFP process, we were not.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: I mean, it would be amazing
19 if they consulted the preeminent organization that's
20 dealing with immigrant issues across New York City.
21 So, I'm a little befuddled by that. In terms of
22 Action NYC, why are there no metrics or performance
23 measures? Action NYC?

24 MANUEL CASTRO: You mean in the preliminary
25 budget or in the -

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Are there any metrics at
3 Action NYC?

4 MANUEL CASTRO: There are, there are and Tom can
5 speak to it but I believe part of the issue is that
6 it's not included in the PMMR, right that you have
7 available?

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Yes.

9 MANUEL CASTRO: We did see that and in fact some
10 of the information there is out of date. We're happy
11 to work with you to make sure you have all available
12 up to date information. Tom can speak about the data
13 that we collect in the matrix that we follow for
14 Action NYC and in fact, it's quite revealing just to
15 give you one example, we received over 60,000 as I
16 mentioned in my testimony, over 60,000 calls to our
17 immigration legal services hotline, which is part of
18 our Action NYC program, which is a record. We've
19 never received that many calls. As a result, we
20 added basic consultations to this hotline because of
21 lack of referrals to legal providers. But I'll let
22 Tom speak about the data that we collect.

23 TOM TORTORICI: Thanks Commissioner. I'll speak
24 briefly. The MOIA publishes its annual report each
25 year under the Charter mandate. Action NYC data is

1 included in that report as well as all other MOIA run
2 initiatives. I have data from calendar year 2023, so
3 Action NYC organizations out performed overall.
4 Their target is by 22 percent and their applications
5 filed were approved at a rate of 97 percent.
6

7 The Action NYC program consists of 18 nonprofit
8 contracted community-based organizations and legal
9 service providers that work in their communities and
10 community-based 649 organizations as well as
11 hospitals, libraries and schools and the program has
12 existed under the HRA contracts since 2021.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Great. We want the good
14 story about performance and the PMMRs since there's
15 not a lot of good data in there or at least under
16 performance, severe under performance.

17 In terms of the hotline, thank you so much for
18 that. Uhm, what is, is there a status update on
19 MOIAs hotline. You mentioned 60,000 received calls
20 and in our last hearing wanted to hear a little bit
21 more about the issues that you're seeing. You know
22 coming through the hotline. Can you tell us a little
23 bit about like what that looks like?

24 MANUEL CASTRO: It depends on which hotline we
25 have. We have two hotlines.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Two hotlines.

3 MANUEL CASTRO: Yes.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay.

5 MANUEL CASTRO: That PMMR needs to be updated for
6 sure. First, Tom can talk about the Immigration
7 Services Hotline, which deals with immigration, your
8 questions and again, we've had a record number of
9 calls. Tom can speak to that. We also have our
10 general X-MOIA hotline, which is meant to compliment
11 the work of 311. It doesn't replace it because we do
12 not have the staffing that 311 has. It's not a call
13 center but it is meant for individuals who are having
14 a hard time getting the information that they're
15 looking for and we often encourage immigrant New
16 Yorkers to call into 311 and if they are not
17 successful in obtaining answers to the question, they
18 can call us.

19 In the past 18-months, last past year, many of
20 the calls that were received have to do with
21 accessing legal services and so, we connect them to
22 our legal services hotline, ASLAN and other resources
23 and we receive a lot of calls to do with IDNYC and
24 when that happens, we again connect them to IDNYC and
25 explain the process to obtaining appointments.

1
2 So again, we're not supposed to replace 311,
3 which is really the main vehicle for people to get
4 their answers, questions answered. We're really
5 there to troubleshoot and navigate whenever they're
6 not successful elsewhere. So, Tom can talk about the
7 legal hotline.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it.

9 TOM TORTORICI: Thanks Commissioner. Just
10 briefly, the hotline has – it was originally created
11 just to schedule Action NYC appointments during the
12 creation of that program in 2015-2016 and has since
13 discovered through the diversity of calls, the
14 variety of caller questions that doing more is
15 necessary, especially given that the demand for
16 immigration legal services is much greater than the
17 supply overall in New York City and across the
18 nation.

19 And so, the hotline, we've added hotline
20 operators. Catholic Charities is the contracted
21 nonprofit that runs the hotline. Hotline operators
22 that are multilingual, especially speaking Haitian
23 Creole given the increase in Haitian nationals coming
24 to New York and also investing in technology bring
25 central systems and other CRMs that help them to

1
2 manage the calls more effectively. They're target
3 deliverable. You know they've exceeded the number of
4 calls received year after year but they're required
5 to answer a minimum of 90 percent of calls without
6 you know allowing for too much of droppage and they
7 have met or come very close to meeting that goal,
8 even with the significant increase in callers.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Does answering mean like
10 literally answering or is that resolution?

11 TOM TORTORICI: Responded to.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay.

13 TOM TORTORICI: Yeah.

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And in terms of how many
15 staffing – what's the staffing for the general Ask
16 MOIA hotline?

17 MANUEL CASTRO: The general Ask MOIA hotline?

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Yeah.

19 MANUEL CASTRO: Just to be specific about the
20 data, it has received close to 6,000; has answered to
21 6,000 inquiries last calendar year and generally two
22 staff rotate the answering the hotline and a couple
23 of fellows, it fluctuates depending on the fellows
24 that we have available.
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it and in terms of the -
3 I'm sorry Commissioner.

4 MANUEL CASTRO: Oh I was just going to say that
5 this is why we say that this is why we say that this
6 is not supposed to replace 311, which does have a
7 call center, so we encourage people if they can't
8 reach us, they should reach out through 311 but we
9 often end up getting some of those more complex calls
10 to our hotline.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Have you looked at the
12 overall universe of related immigration related, that
13 includes 311 data and what MOIA is able to
14 complement?

15 MANUEL CASTRO: No, I mean that's quite
16 challenging because as you mentioned, so many people
17 call into 311 that could be immigrants. That's not
18 information that's readily available or asked by 311
19 operators but when they refer to us, we're able to
20 collect that information.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it and for the, I guess
22 for the Legal Services Hotline with the Catholic
23 Charities, how many people serve that contract?

24 TOM TORTORICI: Currently, there are nine
25 operators, one coordinator and a director.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it, thank you. And I
3 know the answer to this question, have you requested
4 additional funding for MOIAs hotline?

5 TOM TORTORICI: We will engage in the process as
6 we continue.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: We're talking with OMB. What
8 is the fiscal '24 adopted budget and fiscal '25
9 preliminary budget for We Speak NYC?

10 MANUEL CASTRO: I'll let Jasniya speak to the
11 budget in one second.

12 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Thank you so much. For FY24 we
13 have been budgeted at \$873,000. And then for FY25,
14 we are budgeted at \$617,665. And this is due to you
15 know to the PEG. So, we were Pegged under that
16 program for FY25.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: I'm so sorry, can you repeat
18 the second half of that?

19 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Sure, so for FY25.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Yes.

21 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: We are budgeted for \$617,665
22 you know because we were Pegged for you know that
23 program. So, we have cut.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, that was a cut due to
25 the PEG?

1
2 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Hmm, hmm.

3 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And in terms of, what's the
4 status of the We Speak program? Is it available in
5 the HERRCs?

6 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: So, historically the program
7 has been volunteer led, meaning like you know that
8 uhm, any institution, a nonprofit that was interested
9 in providing classes you know would have access to
10 our We Speak material for free right? We would
11 provide technical assistance and essentially we would
12 train them and then they would do it on their own.
13 This fiscal year, you know we have been shifting the
14 way that we actually manage this program and you know
15 and make it accessible you know to communities. You
16 know folks can still ask for this service right?
17 CBOs can still provide the service completely
18 voluntary but recently on February 1st, we launched
19 the pilot program for English, MOIA English Learning
20 and support centers at CBOs. Currently, the pilot is
21 housed at ten CBOs, so they're getting funding to be
22 able to provide these classes. Also, on March 1st,
23 we officially started the pilot with all three
24 library systems to actually provide these classes
25 using our We Speak curriculum as well. And we

1
2 anticipate that for this pilot also with the
3 libraries, we are going to have uhm, at least you
4 know 60 libraries all across the five boroughs
5 providing these classes.

6 On top of that, what I want to also share that
7 we're very excited that we have been also working on
8 and I can brief you, the Commissioner mentioned this,
9 the We Speak material initially was always
10 intermediate level. So, in the past year in change
11 our team has been working to develop at the beginner
12 level, which is what we have been using to roll out
13 as part of these pilots and you know again to be able
14 to support not only the asylum seeker population that
15 has recently arrived, but also longer-term immigrants
16 that you know that can utilize that level.

17 So, we are growing and shifting the way in which
18 we uh, that we manage this program.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, thank you. It's
20 exciting. Anything would be expanding in this
21 context and so for the 60 libraries, this is the
22 curriculum that is handed to the libraries and they
23 figure out how to implement and program within their
24 library. Is that correct?

1
2 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Yeah correct. I mean our
3 curriculum right is very flexible. This is a very
4 practical English Learning class, right? We want to
5 make sure that folks that do attend these classes,
6 that they're able to utilize it right away, right?
7 By learning about not only CD services and you know
8 throughout the city but also to empower them, right?
9 You know as well. So, we provide videos, technical
10 assistance, which is training to facilitators, right?
11 And we work also directly whether it be with
12 libraries or CBOs right, to see how we can actually
13 incorporate this model that we have to perhaps the
14 you know already programs that they have been doing
15 right? Or do this for the first time.

16 MANUEL CASTRO: and if I can just add, again this
17 is a very exciting program for us to develop. We
18 pivoted as Jas described and to clarify, we are
19 funding these CBOs in the libraries to engage in this
20 work and we are providing the technical assistance
21 they need to establish these courses at their sites.
22 This is with the idea that these are trusted sites
23 where newly arrived immigrants or long-term
24 immigrants can connect to and build community, which

1
2 is ultimately what our goal is there in addition to
3 of course learning English.

4 And just to answer your question, we are not at
5 the HERRCs. That is a DYCD program that's at the
6 HERRCs. Our hope though is to connect newly arrived
7 immigrants, asylum seekers, to the classes at these
8 CBOs and at the libraries.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Can you provide a list of
10 the ten CBO partners and how much do you offer to
11 each library to implement the program?

12 MANUEL CASTRO: Jas can provide you with a
13 breakdown.

14 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Sure, again, these are pilot
15 programs, so you know these have also been starting
16 way into the fiscal year. So, we have ten CBOs. We
17 have DSI International, Korean Community Services, La
18 Colmena, Lall, Lack of Hope, Mexican Coalition,
19 Mixteca, Muslim Community Network, Project New Yorker
20 and United Seeks. And these are the ten CBOs that
21 started February 1st. With the libraries, we're
22 working across all three library systems, NYPL with
23 about \$160,000. With Queens Library with about
24 \$246,000 and Brooklyn Library with about \$260,000,
25 you know to be able to do this pilot.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So 360 was for the New York
3 Public Library?

4 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Uhm, 260.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: 260, so between 240 and 260
6 for each of the library systems to implement the
7 program over a years' time?

8 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Well, from now until the end of
9 the fiscal year and we hope to continue this pilot
10 for FY25 and you know we'll continue those
11 conversations with our partners at OMB.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it. Thank you for that.
13 In terms of uhm language access, uhm, what's the
14 budget for language services in fiscal 2024 and 2025?

15 MANUEL CASTRO: I'll let Jasniya also talk about
16 the breakdown of that budget but like I said, as Jas
17 looks for the tab, like I said, it's an area we've
18 expanded from three staff to roughly 20 staff at this
19 point.

20 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: For FY24, for language services
21 and language access specifically, we are budgeted at
22 \$669,000 roughly and then for FY25, uhm, as of right
23 now, we're budgeted for \$534,000 roughly and again
24 for FY25, you know the funding will probably be
25 updated as we move towards the executive budget.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Right and in Fiscal, do you
3 know what the numbers are for Fiscal 2023?

4 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Give me one sec. So, for FY23
5 we have \$1,343,000. I just want to sort of clarify
6 that amount because the bulk of that amount, which is
7 you know a little over \$1 million, actually was moved
8 over to our PS in FY24 to be able to hire you know
9 all of those lines. So I just want to make that
10 note.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Right, so you're not going
12 to give me a heart attack when I say \$1.3 million.

13 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Exactly.

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: \$500,000. Uhm, still
15 nevertheless, \$534,000 given the shortage right and
16 the absolute need of interpreters I mean across the
17 city, 100 percent is not the direction we want the
18 investment to be going in.

19 Uhm, so is the language specialists that MOIA has
20 hired, are you fully staffed at this point?

21 MANUEL CASTRO: Uhm, close to, we're still hiring
22 for two positions and only because the roles need to
23 pass a test that in order to qualify for the job.
24 We're hiring linguists that our community rooted but
25

1
2 nonetheless they have to pass this test in order to
3 serve as language access specialists.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So that would be, you have
5 18 on board and you have two to be in the process?

6 MANUEL CASTRO: We're still in the process of
7 hiring an Urdu language access specialist and a
8 Haitian Creole language access specialist. And all
9 agencies have dedicated language access budgets and
10 staff in particular is to serve for technical
11 assistance and support and to provide inter-rotation
12 and translation for mayoral offices.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it and which languages
14 are mostly in need of translation, interpretation
15 that you're seeing right now?

16 MANUEL CASTRO: Well, in general what we have top
17 ten languages in general. Obviously Chinese and
18 Spanish are the two languages that are most in need
19 for these services but we often say over 200
20 languages are spoken in New York City, most recently
21 in academic but that number had 800. So, again it
22 varies but the top two language are Chinese and
23 Spanish.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it and in terms of where
25 the most significant gaps, obviously with 800

1
2 languages or even 200, that's enormous but we are
3 seeing in communities particularly African migrants
4 speaking all kinds of languages, are you seeing any
5 particular gaps that have been really challenging to
6 fail?

7 MANUEL CASTRO: Yeah, certainly in fact, the
8 first thing at the job I responded to the Bronx fire
9 you know we're a large community of Wolof speaker
10 residents lived and throughout the asylum seeker
11 humanitarian crisis, we've seen languages of limited
12 deficient, such as Wolof present in our system.

13 We hired as part of our language access team; we
14 did hire someone to look specifically at issues to do
15 with languages of limited deficient to think through
16 policy and technical support assistance at other
17 agencies. And of course, you know we're now mandated
18 to report on Local Law 6, so we've recently completed
19 our survey of 68 CBOs across New York City to assess
20 their translation interpretation services.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And are there uhm, what are
22 some concrete examples of existing city language
23 learning and access policies or programs for new
24 immigrants that could be improved in your estimation?

1
2 MANUEL CASTRO: Well, uhm, we just spoke about
3 again, when we're managing crisis, often you know the
4 first work to be done is to respond to the crisis.
5 We then step in such as the case with the Application
6 Help Center and with the Humanitarian Emergency
7 Response Centers to make sure that language access
8 policies are followed through and our team is working
9 actively with that staff to make sure that language
10 access is provided. And it's been a work in progress
11 but we make quite a lot of progress. We've deployed
12 our staff to both spaces. We're providing
13 recommendations and we're working through the
14 challenges there.

15 Uhm, you know we work very closely with all
16 agencies that interact with immigrant communities.
17 We work closely with the NYPD for instance and others
18 to think about ways that they can improve their
19 language access in immigrant communities.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Who holds the master
21 contract for language line? What agency?

22 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: So, DCAs does and they also
23 oversee our procurement for language services
24 contracts or MOIA.

25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And is there, to your
3 knowledge rather, other contracts that serve a
4 similar function that are used by the city?

5 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: I would have to defer to them
6 and probably MOCs in terms of the specifics but my
7 understanding is that there will no longer be a
8 master contract or there's going to be an RFP I
9 believe that is going to -

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Yeah and I totally made that
11 up, I don't know if there was a master contract but
12 it is the tool that agencies say they use and then we
13 hear most about. So, I just assumed -

14 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Yeah, I mean there was a master
15 contract but it has been, it has expired and I know
16 the teams both at DCAS and MOCs are still working on
17 that to be able to provide the services we need.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Has MOIA provided any
19 recommendations around alternative tools to support
20 language access needs in the city?

21 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: I mean not necessarily,
22 specifically on that but I know that our language
23 access team has been and continues to be in close
24 communication with MOCs on language services

1
2 procurements and you know sort of planning for that
3 and they have advised on that, on those pieces.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Yeah, in a recent hearing
5 with Health and Hospitals, we heard really dire need
6 for language access and the hospitals as well. So,
7 it's such a profound need in the city that really
8 requires some like real investment in how to make
9 sure that you know we can address our multilingual
10 community.

11 In terms of this uhm, just switching to the
12 Mayor's American Dream. The city rolled out this new
13 initiative called the American Dream Works, so the
14 Department of Small Business Services designed to
15 connect workers with businesses who need them.
16 Asylum seekers with work authorization are directed
17 as was mentioned earlier to Workforce One centers and
18 businesses through SBS. Can OASO describe like how
19 this initiative will be implemented and what's the
20 budget for it?

21 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I don't have the budget, so I
22 have to get back to you but uhm, the point of that
23 portal was that interested businesses could put their
24 businesses online and we could connect people through
25 the Workforce One centers to those eligible

1
2 businesses. And so, as mentioned, we've given, we've
3 worked with our Department of Labor colleagues and
4 the State Department of Labor colleagues and our SBS
5 colleagues, to give lists of people who have either
6 applied or either applied for work or either had work
7 authorization or have applied to work to then be able
8 to be reached out for an appointment with either a
9 DOL center or an SBS Workforce One Center and then be
10 able to connect them to jobs. We also recently had a
11 meeting with Federal DOL, State DOL, Commissioner
12 Castro and myself and the unions and a lot of other
13 and some nonprofits to deepen that partnership and
14 see what federal pressure and convening can do to
15 make sure that we have more jobs available, so we're
16 working on sort of all levels to be able to do that.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Do you know how many small
18 businesses are involved in initiative currently?

19 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I don't, I'd have to get back
20 to you on specifics.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And are there any nonprofits
22 involved in these conversations?

23 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yeah, so I think, yes, there's
24 absolutely nonprofits involved I think and especially
25 at the most recent convening, we had a fair amount of

1
2 nonprofits who are seeing people come in and really
3 know their needs and trying to get them connected. I
4 mean I think there's two parts of this as
5 Commissioner Castro says, there's the informal
6 economy making sure that people who are working and
7 we know a majority of people are connected to Know
8 Your Rights trainings and know their rights and won't
9 get exploited and then there's also, how do we get
10 people the right types of training to then connect
11 them to the appropriate life affirming jobs.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And is the initiative
13 anticipated to roll into the outyears?

14 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: At this point, yes but I don't
15 know any specifics on dollar figures.

16 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And are there any milestones
17 in terms of the numbers of individuals to be served?

18 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: We are connecting everyone as
19 they become known to us, as someone who has either
20 applied for work authorization or has work
21 authorization to SBS or to the state department of
22 labor. We want to get people connected to work as
23 quickly as possible.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay and in terms of the
25 rising inflation rates, does the administration

1
2 intend to increase funding for workforce development
3 CBOs?

4 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I would have to defer to my
5 partners at OMB.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay, yeah and I guess you
7 know under the guides of the Mayor's American Dream,
8 I'm curious how the Administration is going to
9 address the — growing the neophobia against migrants
10 and asylum seekers. Do you know if there's any
11 budget for that or any?

12 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, the safety security and the
13 uplifting of everyone in our care is top priority for
14 us. Curious to work with you to understand exactly
15 what kind of programming you're thinking there. I
16 think we —

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Well, yeah, it's not a
18 program. It's actually not saying things like,
19 there's false, patently false statements in the news
20 that there's a migrant crime wave or patently false
21 statements that migrants will destroy New York City.
22 That's what we need to make sure it doesn't happen.

23 So, it's a narrative of real leadership, not
24 scapegoating folks when it's politically convenient.

1
2 In terms of – so on the workforce front, we've
3 heard Governor Hochul's executive budget includes the
4 creation of this migrant job bank with over 18,000
5 open positions from nearly 400 companies. 75 percent
6 of these open positions would be in New York City.
7 Pardon me, 75 of the open positions will be in New
8 York City and 24 percent would be in the food and
9 hospitality industry. These jobs, however, only
10 apply to those with work authorization. Have you –
11 are you aware of this migrant job bank and this
12 program and what has been your interaction?

13 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yeah, so that's what I was
14 talking about in terms of the State Department of
15 Labor. We're working really hand and hand with them
16 to ensure that as we get folks along the pathway to
17 work, as we're identifying whose either work eligible
18 or almost work eligible, we're directing them to the
19 State Department of Labor or SBS depending on we have
20 a sharing agreement, to then get connected to the job
21 resources that the state and the city both
22 collectively have so we can get people connected to
23 work.

24

25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, is there an outreach
3 campaign that will be associated with the job bank in
4 this work?

5 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, I can't speak for the
6 state, they do have a website for uhm the Job Fair
7 program or sorry, the job program and they've been
8 doing a fair amount of work on that.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And do you know if any
10 outreach is going to be done in additional languages?
11 Have you seen any additional language outreach?

12 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I mean, they've been working
13 with our individuals to as you know come up from a
14 span of different countries and have a span of
15 different language needs. And so, they've been
16 working with folks in all different types of
17 languages, just as RSBS folks have too.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it and how will migrants
19 be informed about their rights? Uhm, if so, is this
20 work incorporated and how will the information be
21 disseminated?

22 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, I'm going to defer to my
23 colleague over here.

24 TOM TORTORICI: Yes, thank you Molly. We'll
25 certainly promote all of these programs through our

1
2 nonprofit providers. Some of our providers who are
3 serving as navigation sites, do provide as part of
4 their contracted work workforce development services,
5 which includes working closely with folks in the
6 informal sector. This is actually one of the
7 workstreams that OASO, MOIA and others are working on
8 closely together. Recent weeks, we've began
9 conversations about how to support those folks who
10 are entering the informal economy and not just wait
11 until folks get work authorization. But obviously
12 you know the path to work authorization is still very
13 fuzzy, right? For some it take a very long time.
14 And so, we are really - this is part of our advocacy
15 to get the federal government to designate TPS so
16 that the pathway to work authorization is shortened.

17 And so, yes, you know we're working with some of
18 the immigrant worker centers currently. Some of them
19 are nonprofit providers but we want to continue to
20 expand that work because it's a very important
21 workstream for our new strategic approach.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Are these all computer
23 based? Is there any system in place to support those
24 that might not be so tech savvy but are qualified to

1
2 apply for some of these jobs? Like, where will
3 people do that?

4 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, that's why we're connecting
5 them to either the Department of Labor Centers or to
6 the SBS Workforce One centers because that is an in-
7 person process where they can give them the supports
8 they need including like resume building etc.. and
9 then connect them to jobs that are available. And
10 sort of assess every individuals need that way.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, excuse me if I have
12 missed this but for let's say for the Workforce One
13 centers, are they receiving a contract for this
14 specific work, additional contract or is this
15 additional work that they're supposed to do within
16 their current contracts?

17 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, Workforce One Centers get a
18 lot of federal dollars so that's also supporting
19 this. I'd have to defer to them and exactly how they
20 are funding this but this is something that they've
21 taken on over the last couple of months.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you. Thank you.
23 We've gone through a lot. Yeah, we've kind of gone
24 through some of these. In terms of uhm, how many
25 changes of address applications has the city helped

1
2 to file since 2022 and I know we're going to solve
3 this problem. Are individuals that need to file
4 change of address prioritized at the help center in
5 particular?

6 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, at the help center, we
7 allow any - we help people with a change of address
8 form. I don't have the exact numbers in front of me
9 but happy to follow up.

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Great thank you.

11 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: We also help with change of
12 venue for the record.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Change of venue forms? What
14 does that mean?

15 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: If they want to go somewhere
16 else, completely leave the city, yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Reticketing? Is that
18 reticketing?

19 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yes, we do help with that.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: We need a whole like glossy
21 of terms. Uhm, in particular, who has access to the
22 help center?

23 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: The staff that works there and
24 the individuals who have appointments.

25 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, it's appointment based.

1
2 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: It's appointment based.

3 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay and does anyone who
4 needs help with TPS let's say, whether you've been
5 here 5 minutes or 20 years be able to access the help
6 center?

7 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, as we mentioned before, we
8 really focused our asylum application help center and
9 all of our satellites on folks currently in our care.
10 MOIAs providers and MOIAs role is everybody else.

11 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it and so when you say
12 currently in our care, if they are cycling through
13 the system, they've been displaced and are now
14 waiting. Will they be eligible to get access?

15 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, anyone who is currently in
16 our care and any form of that is eligible to get
17 access to our asylum application health center,
18 depending on how many appointments we have on that
19 particular day.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay, so as long as they are
21 in the system, some touch point, they could not be
22 necessarily a shelter resident at that point and time
23 could access the health center.

24 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yeah, and one — and so, for
25 example, the folks who you know we know 60 percent of

1
2 folks have left our care at this point. For the
3 folks who had an asylum application filed with us and
4 it's six months later and it's time for work permits,
5 we will take those individuals as well.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay so it's as available.

7 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yeah, as available.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: How many interpreters and
9 translators are available at the help center?

10 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I have to get back to you on
11 that.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay, uhm and is the budget
13 included in the help center or legal services budget?
14 I think I conflated this year. I'm sorry, the budget
15 for interpreters at the help center?

16 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I'd have to get back to you on
17 the specifics.

18 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay, alright.

19 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Uhm, I'm sorry, just one, I
20 have an update. Total motion to change addresses is
21 583.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Great, I love these nifty
23 phones.

24 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: That's great.
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: I like answers. Uhm, let's
3 see just give me one second, I just wanted to make
4 sure we're getting - is there anything else left
5 there? Uh, okay, great, alright. I just want to
6 make sure, I just want to make sure that we have the
7 numbers clearly stated in the record in terms of uhm
8 so MOIA, for your budget, uhm, your slated \$746,000
9 for six staff plus OTPS, is that correct?

10 JASNIYA SANCHEZ: Uhm, it's \$742,000 for six
11 lines under the Mayor's Office.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it and for OASO, it's
13 \$1.7 million for 10 positions, not including OTPS?

14 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Correct.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it, alright. Uhm, in
16 terms of OASO, where do you refer individuals who
17 require long term legal representation as opposed to
18 the pro se services?

19 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we work with MOIA to make
20 the appropriate referrals.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And where is MOIA finding
22 the referrals?

23 MANUEL CASTRO: Well, I'll let Tom speak to
24 some of this but again, you know the challenge to
25 finding full legal representation to everyone who

1 needs it, has been existing for a very long time,
2 which is why advocates have been calling for
3 universal legal representation but I'll hand it over
4 to them.

5
6 TOM TORTORICI: That's right, for certain case
7 types, there are direct referrals to certain
8 contracted legal service providers. These can
9 include a motion to reopen that is on a critical time
10 period. Otherwise, many help center participants are
11 referred to the general points of entry for
12 immigration legal services that the city has with its
13 tens of millions of dollars and immigration legal
14 service contracts, and that shows up in Action NYC's
15 data. We've seen a dramatic increase in TPS
16 applications that are complex. Often times that
17 means that the individual may have in their case a
18 firm resettlement issue that needs to be dealt with
19 and things like that. So, the broad spectrum of
20 available immigration legal services is also serving
21 newly arrived asylum seekers but there is no very
22 direct referral pathway. It's more general and also
23 specific to the need of the individual.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: How much would you estimate.
25 How much of the need would you estimate or able to

1
2 meet within the current confines of the services that
3 we provide?

4 TOM TORTORICI: I'll have to get back to you with
5 that estimate.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Yeah, I know, shooting by
7 the hip, I get it.

8 MANUEL CASTRO: I mean like I said earlier, there
9 are approximately 1.3 million non-citizens in New
10 York City. All of whom would need some form of legal
11 support, whether it's applying for naturalization,
12 applying, re-applying for a legal permanent residency
13 or other type of immigration legal support.

14 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, it sounds like maybe one
15 percent? We're probably scratching -

16 MANUEL CASTRO: Well, so MOIA manages one program
17 of many. I mean, many that exist in city government.
18 We invest as city government in total over \$70
19 million, something like that.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: In terms of the help center,
21 I just want to make sure, I'm going to run through
22 some quick questions, process. Uhm, for so I think
23 we just talked about this so folks who are within
24 care are eligible for the health, for appointments at
25

1 the help center. What information does an individual
2 have to give when they make an appointment?
3

4 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Let me get back to you on
5 exactly what the screening questions are but then we
6 also have an orientation with them to make sure that
7 it makes whatever we're going to do makes the most
8 sense for them. So, let me get back to you on the
9 exact question.

10 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay, and are certain folks
11 or appointment types prioritized in that system?

12 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yes, because we have a – we're
13 resourced constrained like everybody else and so, we
14 make priorities based on what type of application.
15 So, we've made like I said before when TBS was
16 announced, we put more TPS appointments online and
17 took a little bit less asylum applications to make
18 sure that we could get through TPS as quickly as
19 possible.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it. So, what's the
21 current? Where are we in prioritization at this
22 point?

23 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, currently we're back
24 towards asylum.

25 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it.

1
2 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: We've ramped up asylum. We
3 still have opportunities for TPS and work bad we take
4 them on a rolling basis as people become identified
5 to us as TPS or work eligible but it's more on the
6 asylum side and I just want to answer one question
7 you asked before, how many interpreters? It's 35 to
8 45 on any given day.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Great and in terms – so
10 migrant youth who are in shelter can access the
11 Asylum Help Center?

12 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yes, but we are developing and
13 looking into SIJS cases and what we can do on a more
14 pro se model version of that at this time.

15 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: But for SIJS cases in
16 particular, they're able to access the help center or
17 we're developing? Making sure we can address that?

18 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: We're developing something
19 there because right now that requires representation.

20 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it, thank you. In terms
21 of – are there special providers at the center who
22 can help anyone with youth cases, especially those
23 who are eligible for other forms of relief, like the
24 SIJS.

1
2 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yeah, so we did a pilot of two
3 SIJS cases but I think really with SIJS I'm going to
4 again defer to my MOIA colleagues.

5 MANUEL CASTRO: Tom can speak about SIJS in
6 particular but we're certainly looking at all
7 different options, pro se, full legal rep and so on.
8 We understand that these are very complex cases.
9 They require a special type of care and so we've been
10 speaking to many different experts who work on these
11 issues and we hope to have something in place. Tom,
12 if you want to talk a little bit about our work
13 there.

14 TOM TORTORICI: Sure, special immigrant juvenile
15 status can be a life changing form of relief and
16 protection for immigrant youth. And as Commissioner
17 Castro mentioned, we're actively thinking about and
18 exploring ways to increase access to that benefit.
19 There are many barriers along the way, not only
20 within the federal government and access to legal
21 support but also in the family courts. And so, we're
22 working to identify ways to maximize the existing
23 capacity and also address the need more broadly.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And are you working with
25 specific providers at this point on these cases?

1
2 TOM TORTORICI: Under MOIAs purview, the Action
3 NYC and schools team is the team under that program
4 that handles the highest number of SIJS cases.

5 Action NYC and hospitals team also handles some. The
6 majority of youth focused immigration legal services
7 housed under HRA and the Office of Civil Justice.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it, thank you. And are
9 asylum seekers receiving full legal intake at the
10 help centers to see if they're going to be eligible
11 for other immigration benefits, like U-VISAs, do they
12 get a full?

13 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we really focus on asylum
14 TPS or work authorization at this time but if they
15 have other types of needs, then we refer them out to
16 other folks.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: So, they are screened but
18 maybe not supported? Well, they can't be serviced at
19 the help center for those other venues?

20 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: Yeah.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: You look like you're going
22 to say something.

23 MANUEL CASTRO: No, I was going to say, expand
24 further, as Tom mentioned, the contract that falls

1
2 under the purview of DSS, often known as IOI, takes
3 on many of these complex types of cases.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And does MOIA and OASO
5 anticipate challenges? Having often traumatized
6 young people who are alone to figure out how to
7 navigate the Family Court System or Immigration
8 Court?

9 MANUEL CASTRO: Our Mayor's Office of Community
10 Mental Health, recently put out a resource guide for
11 providers, in which to support this community
12 undergoing this very traumatic experiences. I know
13 we do have personnel both at the application center,
14 at the HERRCs and everywhere where asylum seekers are
15 staying available for them to connect with.

16 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: And we had therapy dogs a
17 couple of times which was very nice but we actually
18 have staff on site at our application center.

19 TOM TORTORICI: And MOIA also has contracts with
20 nonprofits that provide trainings to our immigration
21 legal navigators and their Action NYC and other
22 programs. These include vicarious trauma and trauma
23 informed care.

24 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: And hopefully taking care of
25 all the staff members that are holding everyone's

1 trauma as well. Thank you. Who makes the
2 determination if an individual is eligible for TPS?
3

4 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, we have screening questions
5 in shelter. We, uhm, if somebody for this effort, we
6 identified those who had self-reported as Venezuelan
7 who had come in before a specific time. We reached
8 out to them. We had a series of screening questions
9 to figure out if they really were. What we would
10 consider eligible for TPS and then we help schedule
11 them for an appointment at our satellite clinics or
12 the Asylum Application Help Center.

13 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it and when they come
14 in, do they have to request like the application type
15 or how is that?

16 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: No, this was a direct funnel.
17 It was sort of a cohesive effort between our shelter
18 staff and the folks and then the actual application
19 and then we also had the federal government on site
20 to help give receipt notices right there and then and
21 there and help us through the process.

22 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Got it and are any of the
23 legal service providers required to provide any of
24 the information they gather from individuals to OASO
25 or MOIA, or any other city agency?

1
2 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: In terms of — so what kind of
3 information, just trying to understand.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: I guess what kind of
5 information would the legal service providers have to
6 report to any city agency?

7 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, I don't know the metrics
8 that they use in MOIA. I think we have some clear, I
9 mean we directly manage our asylum application help
10 center and our satellite so we have sort of metrics
11 there but other than that, no.

12 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Okay. Uhm, we are wrapping
13 up and I know you have to all go. Uhm, how are
14 people in upstate locations accessing legal services?

15 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: So, the state through their \$20
16 million funding; I think it was, they funded \$20
17 million for legal and case management support,
18 specifically for our upstate hotels.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Are you involved in that
20 coordination or?

21 MOLLY SCHAEFFER: I mean, yes, our staff has to
22 be because those folks are coming into our shelters,
23 so our staff is coordinated with them to make sure
24 that they have appropriate access.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Alright, so excited. We
3 make it through so much. So much to go. No,
4 kidding. Alright, I think uhm, great, uh let me just
5 make sure. Uhm, last question, this is going to be
6 really tough. What is the city doing to protect new
7 arrivals against legal service fraud?

8 MANUEL CASTRO: This is actually one of the most
9 important questions in fact. Most recently raised by
10 the Ecuadorian community, we're seeing a large amount
11 of misinformation in their communities as talk about
12 potential TPS starts to ramp up. We partner with
13 DCWP, Department of Consumer and Worker Protections
14 who manages, oversees the program. That the fight
15 against immigration legal services fraud, we however
16 do utilize our outreach staff to make sure that our
17 communities are educated and this is — for this
18 reason we set up this hotline so that the folks can
19 have, is they cannot access other information through
20 311 information through our hotline.

21 And I think this is going to be one of the
22 biggest efforts we undertake because again, there are
23 many bad actors trying to take advantage of these
24 vulnerable communities.
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: It's been a long-standing
3 problem in our communities, so many bad actors.
4 Thank you. I think with that, I would like to thank
5 the Administration. Thank you all for bearing with
6 us through these questions and obviously, thank all
7 the staff for their work on the ground and I know
8 these conversations are tough but we have to hold a
9 standard of excellence and you know what we see often
10 is what is playing on the ground doesn't necessarily
11 reflect what we are talking about and how we're
12 characterizing the situation. So, it's important to
13 bring transparency and accountability and hold each
14 other to the highest standard if possible to make
15 sure that we have dignity for all New Yorkers,
16 whether you're here five minutes or I said 30 decades
17 in another hearing which is absurd. Uhm I don't know
18 anyone that old or a long time, so I just, I want to
19 thank you for that. We'll continue, obviously
20 there's a lot to follow up on. Many questions that
21 were not answered here, we will be following up to
22 get those responses. I would have loved to see MOIA
23 say we need \$150 million for legal service provision,
24 including the request for additional money for adult
25 literacy and baselining of those monies but a last

1
2 year negotiating with OMB, so we'll continue to have
3 these conversations. So, thank you for your time.

4 MANUEL CASTRO: Chair Avilés, thank you so much
5 for your questions. My staff will be working closely
6 with your staff to answer those questions. Also,
7 thank you to the Committee Staff. I did want to well
8 again shout out MOIA staff, OASO staff, all the city
9 employees and our partners working in this response.
10 I also want to shout out everyone that will be
11 testifying today. Not long ago, I was hear
12 testifying as an advocate, certainly pushing for
13 resources. I know that my staff will be watching,
14 paying close attention, taking notes about everything
15 that people will be sharing today. Thank you so
16 much.

17 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you and with that,
18 we'll turn to public testimony. [03:22:18] -
19 [03:22:30]

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Aviles and
21 thank you to the Administration. We will now turn to
22 public testimony. We will be limiting public
23 testimony today to three minutes each. Please note
24 that if your prepared testimony exceeds three minutes
25 in addition to testifying before the Committees

1
2 today, you may also submit your full testimony to the
3 record up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing
4 by emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov.

5 If you are here to testify in person and you have
6 not yet completed a witness slip, please visit the
7 Sergeants table and complete a witness slip now.
8 Even if you register to testify online. That way
9 we'll know that you've made it in person and I know
10 to call on you.

11 For in person panelists, please come up to the
12 table once your name has been called. And with that,
13 I will call our first panel momentarily. Alright,
14 first up, we'll hear from Monique Francis, Meetu
15 Dhar, Liza Schwartzwald, Margaret Martin, Kelly-
16 Agnew-Barajas, and Harold Solis. [03:23:50]-
17 [03:24:10]

18 Alright and we'll start from my right, your left
19 so whenever you're ready, you may begin.

20 MONIQUE FRANCIS: Good afternoon.

21 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Good afternoon.

22 MONIQUE FRANCIS: Thank you. Thank you
23 Chairperson Avilés and members of the Immigration
24 Committee for inviting us to submit our testimony
25 today on behalf of CUNY Citizenship Now. My name is

1
2 Monique Francis and I'm currently serving as the
3 Interim Executive Director of CUNY Citizenship Now.
4 With me today is our Managing Attorney for community
5 events Meetu Dhar, and she also manages our City
6 Council Program.

7 We are here today to speak on how the funding
8 from the City Council for our program has continued
9 to transform the lives of your constituents. Our
10 priority and commitment to you remains in assisting
11 every New Yorker on the path towards legalizing their
12 status, with the ability to have work authorization
13 and eventually becoming U.S. Citizens.

14 Our program was created with the vision of
15 returning power to immigrant New Yorkers. Utilizing
16 a model of pro se legal services, we empower
17 immigrants with knowledge which allows them to
18 advocate on their own immigration case. Twenty-seven
19 years later, our pro se service is a widely
20 recognized model for legal services providers around
21 the nation and has now been adopted as the model and
22 solution to respond to the migrant crisis the city is
23 facing. Given our expertise in processing large
24 numbers of applications in a group processing event,

1
2 our goal is to create a similar program for asylum
3 seekers with your support.

4 Many of you have hosted and sponsored our large-
5 scale Citizenship Application Assistance Events where
6 we serve on average 100 green card holders on a
7 single Saturday. These monthly events, which are
8 held in City Council districts, broaden our outreach
9 to the city's diverse immigrant communities. At
10 these events, our attorneys, paralegals and trained
11 volunteers offer one-on-one consultations to assess
12 participants' eligibility for immigration benefits
13 and assist them in applying for these benefits when
14 qualified.

15 Since the inception of our City Council Program
16 in 2010, more than 68,000 New Yorkers have been
17 assisted from funding received from the City Council.
18 Last fiscal year alone we assisted just under 5,000
19 of your constituents. We are before the Committee
20 today, seeking a restoration of our \$3.1 million
21 dollar allocation and asking for an increase of \$1.5
22 million dollars for the Fiscal Year 2025 to address
23 the growing surge and demand for services from the
24 communities we serve. Meetu?

1
2 MEETU DHAR: Thank you. And thank you again
3 Chairperson Avilés for holding this meeting. At
4 Council Member locations, in addition to helping New
5 York City immigrants become U.S. citizens, we also
6 assist them to adjust their status to become lawful
7 permanent residents, and file petitions on behalf of
8 their family members. Beyond citizenship, we
9 prioritize assisting with humanitarian benefits such
10 as Temporary Protected Status, TPS and the renewal of
11 applications for Deferred Action for Childhood
12 Arrivals, DACA. These are just some of the case
13 types that we work on.

14 A crucial component of our pro se model is the
15 distribution of information to the immigrant
16 community about our services and the constantly
17 changing immigration policies. We disseminate this
18 information through media promotions, briefings,
19 presentations at town halls, immigration forums, and
20 tabling.

21 In partnership with the City Council, we aim to
22 educate the immigrant population and offer a free
23 high-quality alternative to notarios and other
24 unethical legal service providers. We are seeking a
25 budgetary increase to expand our scope of services to

1
2 New York City's recent migrants by providing asylum
3 screenings, assisting with employment authorization
4 applications, and providing orientations regarding
5 immigration custom enforcement reporting and
6 immigration court procedures. Additional funding
7 will allow our attorneys to assist constituents to
8 complete asylum applications.

9 We note some immigration filing fees are
10 increasing and some application forms are changing on
11 April 1, 2024. That's right around the corner. We
12 have recently begun to see a surge in requests for
13 appointments. With application filing fees for
14 certain benefits significantly increasing, we are
15 currently prioritizing the cases that will be most
16 impacted by this increase. Further, in the upcoming
17 months as this is an election year, we are seeing an
18 elevated demand for our citizenship services. Your
19 expanded funding will allow CUNY Citizenship Now to
20 provide these additional immigrants and all New York
21 City immigrants continued access to free, high
22 quality, and confidential legal services. We thank
23 you for your continued support and look forward to
24 being able to expand our legal services to New York
25 City's immigrant community. Thank you.

1
2 LIZA SCHWARTZWALD: Thank you for the opportunity
3 to testify today. My name is Liza Schwartzwald with
4 the New York Immigration Coalition and thank you
5 again to the Council for your leadership on
6 immigration issues.

7 Now, New York seems to be at a crossroads in how
8 and who it chooses to prioritize when budgets are
9 concerned. False narratives of budget scarcity and
10 scapegoating new arrivals have been used to justify
11 unnecessary austerity measures that not only harm our
12 most vulnerable communities, particularly Black,
13 Brown, immigrant and LGBTQ communities but all New
14 Yorkers. We must fund the following priorities and
15 programs in the upcoming budget to protect the
16 interest, safety and quality of life of all New
17 Yorkers. We must renew funding for critical outreach
18 programs for immigrants, including the Access Health
19 Initiative and the Key to the City Initiative, which
20 help connect thousands of immigrant New Yorkers to
21 critical services. We must ensure the restoration of
22 funding to 3K and PreK programs which are often the
23 only free early childhood education and care
24 available to many immigrants. We must expand the
25 Promise New York City Childcare Voucher Program to at

1
2 \$20 million to continue to providing childcare to the
3 youngest immigrant children who are not eligible for
4 other forms of childcare vouchers. We must fully
5 invest in the New York Public Schools and CUNY.
6 Including protecting and expanding investments in the
7 six English Language Learner transfers outside of
8 Manhattan that support new comers and asylum seeker
9 students where they live and work, and international
10 schools who specialize in supporting immigrant
11 students. We must further protect programs at risk
12 of the federal cliff including translation and
13 interpretation and immigrant family engagement
14 programs. We must allocate funding in the city
15 budget to expand City FHEPS voucher programs, support
16 Intro. 210 to end shelter restrictions, invest \$58
17 million in immigrant legal services funding, invest
18 \$5 million in funding to maintain the city's language
19 access worker cooperatives, which connect trained
20 professional interpreters to city agencies and city
21 run providers. While supporting immigrant New
22 Yorkers to pursue careers as language services
23 professionals. We must renew all adult literacy
24 initiative council funding and baseline the full
25 \$21.7 million that is in the Mayor's Preliminary

1
2 Budget and restore funding for professional
3 development and technical assistance for DYCD funded
4 adult literacy programs that was decoupled from the
5 funding to the programs themselves in FY24.

6 In order to meet the overwhelming and unmet needs
7 of New Yorkers, whether they've been here for 30
8 years or 30 days, we must act strategically and not
9 in a reactionary manner. We applaud the Council's
10 commitment to championing realistic and responsible
11 fiscal commitments that represent the needs of New
12 Yorkers and the true state of our city's budget.

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

15 MARGARET MARTIN: Good afternoon Council Chair
16 Avilés and members of the New York City Council
17 Committee on Immigration. I am Margaret Martin, the
18 Co-Director of Immigrant and Refugee Services, joined
19 today by my fellow Co-Director Kelly Agnew-Barajas.
20 We are here on behalf of Catholic Charities Community
21 Services of the Archdiocese of New York. Thank you
22 for the opportunity to provide testimony to you
23 today.

24 Catholic Charities is proud of our decades long
25 tradition of welcoming New Yorks immigrants and

1
2 refugees. Our services have tremendous impact on
3 communities across New York City in all five
4 boroughs. The scope and diversity of our services is
5 exceptional.

6 With the arrival of more than 170,000 asylum
7 seekers to New York City, each of our programming
8 spaces has been profoundly impacted. We strongly
9 recommend that the City Council support efforts to
10 improve overall coordination of legal and social
11 services aimed at serving asylum seekers and to
12 invest in building capacity for the long term.

13 We urge the City Council to advocate for
14 maintaining the Action NYC in Schools program, which
15 has provided critical legal services to thousands of
16 school children, families and community members in
17 schools since 2016. In partnership with 129 New York
18 City public schools. Urge the City Council to ensure
19 the ongoing support of the Haitian Response
20 Initiative, which is a unique, culturally and
21 linguistically responsive program that redresses the
22 desperate legal treatment and lack of resources
23 available to the Haitian immigrant community.

24 To ensure the continued support of Catholic
25 Charities Action NYC Hotline, which provides

1 critical, legal information, appointments, and legal
2 referrals to immigrant New Yorkers.
3

4 To continue the support of Catholic Charities and
5 the Immigrant Opportunity Initiatives Citywide
6 Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative, CILEC,
7 which provides services and partnership with
8 grassroots community-based organizations for
9 immigrant New Yorkers in hard-to-reach communities.

10 And to continue support for the Legal Aid Societies
11 Immigrant Opportunity Initiative, of which Catholic
12 Charities is a subcontractor providing legal
13 representation for particularly vulnerable and
14 underserved communities.

15 To maintain and expand the support of the I Care
16 Coalition, which provides legal assistance to record
17 numbers of vulnerable children and families since
18 2016 in New York. Excuse me, since 2014 in New York.
19 Thank you.

20 KELLY AGNEW-BARAJAS: I'll carry on for a few
21 more points on behalf of Catholic Charities. I want
22 to also emphasize that in addition to the new
23 arrivals, our long-standing immigrant communities
24 continue to need the support that they always have
25 and that the underinvestment in these programs and

1
2 critical services is really you know coming to a head
3 at this point that these services are needed more
4 than ever.

5 So, in particular, over the past two years,
6 25,000 Ukrainian arrivals have come to New York City.
7 This would have been a much bigger story – oh, sorry,
8 I'm on my new three minutes.

9 As well as long standing communities needing you
10 know undocumented folks needing all sorts of
11 different supports, language services, you know
12 resources, legal services and information. So, in
13 particular I just want to highlight two areas. One
14 is that Catholic Charities is a member of our Day
15 Laborer Worker Initiative and that we are seeing
16 record numbers of waiting lists. You know managing a
17 huge demand of people seeking work safety training,
18 the OSHA training, need for wage theft protection
19 advocacy is skyrocketing and we're wanting to invest
20 and grow in that area in particular, as well as has
21 been raised many times earlier today, the
22 underinvestment in adult literacy.

23 In particular, the program that we run, we you
24 know see members coming from all five boroughs
25 because we're in a very accessible spot. That's one

1
2 of the benefits of being in New York City that people
3 can choose where they want.

4 So, that particular model really eliminated a
5 program like ours, where people come from all over.
6 People might come because of the diversity of
7 different language learners that they want to really
8 have a different experience and not necessarily be in
9 their own neighborhood for whatever reason. So,
10 we're seeing that. It's a lack of flexibility in
11 that model and really disadvantages a program like
12 ours.

13 Uhm, so I would just you know urge for increased
14 coordination. Overall services are needing much more
15 investment, long term programs that really can be
16 multi-year and for the city to be up to date with
17 their payments is really important. Thank you.

18 HAROLD SOLIS: Good afternoon Chair Avilés. My
19 name is Harold Solis. I am the Co-Legal Director at
20 Make the Road New York. On behalf of our 27,000
21 members and staff, I thank the Committee for the
22 opportunity to share our concerns with the Fiscal
23 Year '25 budget and its impact on all immigrant New
24 Yorkers.

1
2 Make the Road firmly believes in safeguarding and
3 promoting the dignity and fairness across our
4 society, having centered our work around these
5 principles for the past 25 years. However, recent
6 times have seen a surge in calls for the city to
7 abandon this principles, with the Administration
8 intent on slashing essential funding and attributing
9 these cuts solely to the city's newest members.

10 In the face of escalating scapegoating of
11 immigrants, we implore you to shift the focus towards
12 viable solutions. The city must fortify, rather than
13 undermine, the critical services and funding that our
14 diverse communities need. We ask the Council to use
15 every available tool to reverse the Mayor's sweeping
16 proposed cuts to vital services, which would force
17 reductions in our city-funded legal, health, and
18 educational services.

19 Now, I'm going to focus on a couple of key
20 concerns. The first one that comes to mind for us
21 are the proposed about \$600,000 cuts that have been
22 proposed to a program that's called the Rapid
23 Response Legal Collaborative. I heard it mentioned
24 in passing this morning, the RRLC.

1
2 The RRLC has been instrumental in safeguarding
3 the rights of immigrant New Yorkers on the brink of
4 deportation. This is a program that's been
5 exclusively designed to provide really highly complex
6 immigration legal assistance to people who are on the
7 verge of deportation. I literally have attorney's on
8 my team who have pulled, thanks to their efforts,
9 pulled people off the line who are on their way to a
10 plane to be deported outside of the U.S. And a
11 significant number of these individuals are in these
12 situations due to the technical complexities of the
13 immigration system and often despite having
14 meritorious claims and defenses that would otherwise
15 allow them to remain in the United States.

16 In recent months and the way this all ties into
17 all of this, in recent months, the RRLC has seen a
18 substantial increase in referrals, often from the
19 city's own Asylum Help Center. This is ironic
20 because at a time when we are receiving you know
21 nearly 60 percent more compared to the prior years in
22 terms of referrals from the city. To see that number
23 of referrals and at that same time see these proposed
24 cuts, it's really devastating and sends the wrong
25

1
2 message. We strongly urge the Committee to resist
3 any cuts to this program.

4 Second, our city funded Adult English classes
5 help immigrant New Yorkers find better jobs and help
6 their kids in school. This is common sense. Yet,
7 we're hearing rumors about cuts and at this time, we
8 would ask the Committee to work with DYCD to make
9 some of the changes that were requested by the New
10 York City Coalition for Adult literacy. It's this
11 time when we have to ask ourselves, how is it that we
12 expect newcomers to the city to integrate and better
13 assimilate themselves and navigate this city and at
14 the same time, we cut vital services that they might
15 need.

16 Our written testimony has more details but I'll
17 just say thank you for your support and for your
18 leadership in this moment.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you. Thank you all
20 for your testimony. Just to note, uhm, we will be
21 having a conversation within the Preliminary Budget
22 where DYCD will be specifically on the Adult Literacy
23 contract and the utter problems that are emerging
24 there, so you have our commitment as we've been
25 working with the coalition and other Council Members

1
2 to do better. Not only to maintain the funding but
3 to actually increase the funding, so we are working
4 hard on that.

5 You know I guess, I wanted to say to all of you,
6 you know thank you for the work that we know you are
7 not being paid for even when you are getting paid on
8 time from the city. We know every agency has
9 historically been front and center to community
10 needs, so I want to personally thank you for that
11 work. Our office has certainly benefited in
12 partnership with CUNY, certainly in partnership with
13 Make the Road and Catholic Charities long track
14 record in this area. So, uhm, I know you'll be
15 sticking with us through this, yes, the cuts and the
16 face of not being necessary or particularly egregious
17 and we agree with you, that this is not the place to
18 cut services, particularly when you have a surplus,
19 and navigating collectively, we're navigating this
20 continued scapegoating that is happening that says
21 we're being benevolent at the same time, blaming
22 everyone for everything. Blaming migrants, new
23 arrivals for everything and the unsafe conditions
24 that that creates in communities that we all know
25 because we see it on a day-to-day basis.

1
2 So, I want to thank you for bringing in sanity
3 and leadership and services to vulnerable people who
4 are just on their pathway to a healthy and dignified
5 life. And so, I want to thank you and we'll continue
6 to do that work together. And I just lastly have to
7 point out, I'm preaching to the choir here, is the
8 reason why I said 40 percent of New York City is
9 immigrants over and over again. The budget of MOIA
10 is under \$1 million. The budget of OASO is \$1.2
11 million. When we have a city budget, yes there are
12 additional services there that we all know about,
13 nevertheless, collectively we have a budget of \$109.6
14 billion when 40 percent of our population are
15 immigrants and could use a wide range of these
16 services. It is Grotesk that we have not figured out
17 how to service people with dignity and to do a better
18 job.

19 Clearly no one picked up on that in the prior
20 panel but I thank you and we'll continue to fight for
21 budget justice for our communities. I appreciate it,
22 thank you.

23 PANEL: Thank you.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
25 testimony. We will now turn to our next in person

1
2 panel. We'll hear from Ellen Pachnanda, Karla
3 Ostolaza, Deborah Lee, Marc Valinoti, Tania Mattos,
4 and Alex Rizio. [03:44:29]- [03:44:52] And you may
5 begin whenever you're ready.

6 KARLA OSTOLAZA: Good afternoon. My name Karla
7 Ostolaza and I am the Managing Director of the
8 Immigration Practice at The Bronx Defenders. Thank
9 you Chair Avilés and this Committee for the chance to
10 speak about our work defending detained immigrant New
11 Yorkers. The Committees leadership was essential to
12 the launching of the New York Immigrant Family Unity
13 Project, NYIFUP ten years ago and its continued
14 unwavering support has saved lives and brought hope
15 to thousands of immigrants, immigrant families in
16 despair.

17 Together with Brooklyn Defender Services and the
18 Legal Aid Society, we're requesting level funding of
19 \$16.6 million so that we can continue our critical
20 work. Today, I'd like to share some information
21 about ICEs price in detention. We will get into
22 other areas of need and in our written testimony but
23 I wanted to share a little bit about ICEs price in
24 detention because it's a concerning matter for us.
25 39,000 people are currently in ICE detention. 39,000

1 human beings that have been separated from their
2 families and communities, put in shackles, thrown in
3 jail cells with abysmal conditions and expected to
4 navigated a highly complex legal system without
5 representation.

6
7 The 39,000 people ICE holds any given day
8 represent an alarming 45 percent increase from last
9 year. These are ICE's numbers, these are not CBP
10 numbers. It's not the Boarder Patrol numbers. Our
11 experience on the ground matches the story told by
12 these nation-wide statistic. This Fiscal Year, our
13 holistic teams made up of attorneys, social workers,
14 advocates and professionals have been working
15 tirelessly to serve our rapidly increasing detained
16 population. ICE is aggressively moving to detain New
17 Yorkers based on minor, even dismiss criminal
18 charges, as well as targeting of long-time permanent
19 residence for old convictions, without regard for
20 their rehabilitation or their role in their families
21 and communities.

22 We have also noticed an increase in home rates in
23 the city and of arrests at ICEs offices when
24 immigrants go in for regular check ins to try to meet
25 reporting requirements. We expect this trend to

1
2 escalate as the anti-immigrant sentiment continues to
3 take hold. Given the upcoming federal elections,
4 we're also preparing for our potential new
5 administration that will double down on this trend.
6 We need the Council to continue its unwavering
7 support of NYIFUP so we can continue providing high
8 quality clients and their representation to detain
9 immigrant New Yorkers, as they are increasingly
10 targeted for detention and exile. And we also
11 appreciate and you know ask for the continued support
12 of the Council in maintaining our detainer laws and
13 continue to strengthen those laws, because it's
14 completely connected how our communities are targeted
15 and un funnel to the deportation system. Thank you.

16 ELLEN PACHNANDA: Good afternoon Chair Avilés.
17 My name is Ellen Pachnanda and I'm the Director of
18 the Immigration Practice at Brooklyn Defender
19 Services. Our immigration practice protects the
20 rights of immigrant New Yorkers by defending against
21 ICE detention and deportation, minimizing the
22 negative immigration consequences of criminal and
23 family charges for non-citizen and representing
24 immigrants and applications for immigration benefits.
25 Thank you Chair and this Committee for the

1
2 opportunity to testify about our budget needs to
3 serve the immigrant community in New York City.

4 As you know our expertise lies in full
5 representation in complex legal matters, where our
6 clients have criminal or family system involvement.
7 We represent long term New York City residents in
8 complex detained and non-detained immigration cases.
9 We also represent recent arrivals who are targeted by
10 the city's broken windows policies.

11 Once our team secures clients release, we
12 continue representing them in complex non-detained
13 matters. The enormous backlog of non-detained cases
14 only grows, resulting in prejudicial consequences for
15 our clients who are left in limbo. We applaud the
16 City Councils unwavering support for the detainer
17 laws and encourage support for pending measures to
18 strengthen these detainer laws. Including the ISO
19 legislative package of Intro.'s 158, 184, and 185.
20 We strongly oppose any changes to existing detainer
21 laws which would allow local law enforcement to
22 transfer anyone suspected of committing serious
23 crimes to ICE.

24 We thank this Committee for its ongoing
25 commitment to NYIFUP and safeguarding New York City's

1
2 immigrant community. This support is critical to
3 allow us to respond to increased enforcement and
4 federal policy shifts. Our requested funding of level
5 funding of \$16.6 million split between our three
6 organizations will ensure that we can continue to
7 provide the highest quality of legal services to
8 immigrant New Yorkers. Thank you for your time.

9 DEBORAH LEE: My name is Deborah Lee and I'm the
10 attorney in charge of the immigration law unit at the
11 Legal Aid Society. We thank Chair Avilés for this
12 opportunity and this Committee for its historic
13 support. As my colleagues from the Bronx Defenders
14 and Brooklyn Defender Services have noted, we only
15 expect a trend toward the increased detention and
16 deportation of New Yorkers. This trend includes the
17 resumption of deportations to Venezuela, a country
18 which continues to suffer an utter breakdown in civil
19 government and protections.

20 We are concerned by the Mayor statements about
21 collaborating with ICE for any one he suspects of
22 committing a crime. Whether a recent arrival or a
23 long-term resident, Legal Aid is proud to have
24 detainer laws here that ensure that New York City
25 complies with its constitutional requirement of

1
2 probable cause. Legal Aid is working at capacity to
3 deal with the constant request for legal
4 representation before the immigration court. Within
5 our youth project alone, we take on at least two
6 emergency special immigrant juvenile cases every
7 single month, rushing to prepare clients, filings and
8 constantly pushing for family court hearing dates
9 before our clients age out.

10 All hands must be on deck to deal with these
11 situations and to ensure that these clients can
12 pursue SIJS while concurrently addressing the social
13 service and mental health needs of these clients with
14 complex trauma histories. This is in addition to our
15 work existing clients and other new clients who are
16 not in absolute last-minute crisis. We are committed
17 to legal education, whether it be to a video about
18 what will happen in immigration court or providing an
19 immigration one on one training to parents at PS 139
20 and 315 who have banded together to support families
21 at Floyd Bennett Field.

22 To support our efforts, Legal Aid is asking for
23 straight restoration of our NYIFUP funding,
24 \$5,533,333 for each provider, a total of \$16.6
25 million. An increase in our unaccompanied minors and

1 families funding to \$1.85 million to reflect our cost
2 after five years of flat funding and increased
3 demand.
4

5 In anticipation of an RFP for our immigrant
6 opportunities initiative work, legal aid would like
7 to highlight concerns submitted to HRA, DSS with our
8 concept paper with other providers. We will provide
9 a copy to this Committee with our written testimony.
10 Legal Aid is committed to fighting for immigrants
11 rights and asks this committee to remain steadfast in
12 its commitment. Thank you again for this opportunity
13 to appear before you today.

14 TANIA MATTOS: Good afternoon Chairwoman, my name
15 is Tania Mattos. I'm the Interim Executive Director
16 at Unlocal. Uhm, thank you for the opportunity to
17 testify Chairwoman. Unlocal is a community center
18 nonprofit organization that provide direct
19 immigration legal representation and community
20 education to New Yorks undocumented immigrant
21 communities.

22 I'm here to talk about two programs. One is the
23 Pro Se Plus Project and the other is the Rapid
24 Response Legal Collaborative. The Pro Se Plus
25 Project is a strategic collaboration between Unlocal

1
2 African communities together, Catholic Migration
3 Services, Central American Legal Assistance, NYLAG,
4 MASA and Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid and we're
5 partially funded by the city.

6 In 2023, we've conducted 90 community
7 presentations, trained, had 35 trainings where we
8 trained over, almost 2,000 supporters, helped 13
9 legal clinics and helped thousands of individuals
10 apply for asylum.

11 Now in 2023, we're set to enhance our pro se
12 model in support by extending beyond the initial
13 filing of asylum applications. Our expansion
14 includes preparing people for court, preparing
15 declarations for hearings, compiling country
16 conditions etc., and in many cases we provide friend
17 of the court appearance and take on full
18 representation of cases. We urge the city to
19 continue investment in our proven model, which has
20 offered a crucial legal support to thousands of
21 people in the immigration cases but we're afraid that
22 this might be similar to year-by-year funding that
23 we'd have to fight for. So, we encourage them
24 multiyear funding to happen for the Pro Se Plus
25 project. And finally, I want to address the profound

1
2 impact of the Mayor's announced budget cuts impacting
3 the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative. A
4 collaborative involving Unlocal, Make the Road and
5 New York Legal Assistance Group and I'm profoundly
6 concerned about the proposed loss of city funding to
7 this program. This program was established during
8 the Trump Administration and exclusively take on
9 deportation, people with deportation orders for long
10 standing residents and for new New Yorkers. We
11 provide vital free legal services that would
12 otherwise cost thousands of dollars and it basically
13 is our community members last stance before being
14 deported. It stands a unique and invaluable project
15 in the entire country. Unfortunately the Mayor has
16 proposed slashing the budget and referrals to the RLC
17 have since doubled since last October and ironically
18 like Make the Road mentioned is that many of these
19 referrals come from the city's own asylum centers.

20 So, we urge you to collaborate with nonprofits
21 and reconsider these cuts and fund the Rapid Response
22 Legal Collaborative as it is a vital safeguard in
23 rights and livelihoods of our fellow New Yorkers and
24 join us in preserving it. Thank you for your time.

1
2 MARC VALINOTI: Good afternoon Chair Avilés and
3 the Committee and thank you. My name is Marc
4 Valinoti and I am the Assistant Director for
5 Immigrant and Domestic Violence Services at NMIC,
6 which is actually celebrating their 45th year as a
7 Settlement House serving communities across New York
8 with a focus on Washington Heights in the Bronx.

9 Our memo goes further into our legal services,
10 including immigration and our funding sources. City
11 funding initiatives enable us to provide a variety of
12 services that impact thousands of immigrant New
13 Yorkers, however, NMIC and other providers are on the
14 brink of crisis. MOIA, which has funded the
15 successful nine-year Action NYC program, will
16 terminate the program at the end of the calendar
17 year.

18 In its place, a concept paper ask for drastically
19 more of our organizations with no additional funding.
20 The paper will also completely restructure our
21 services and invaluable access points like libraries
22 and hospitals we terminated. This will have a dire
23 effect on our communities. Other long dependable
24 funders like DYCD has signaled their intent to
25

1
2 possibly reduce funding or restrict services to our
3 most vulnerable populations.

4 Your support for a robust and stable funding for
5 our work can send a strong message to city funders
6 and will make a huge difference in the lives of our
7 community members. Like NMICs client John.

8 John was 17 when he came to NMIC through our
9 Action NYC hotline. He had entered the U.S. as a
10 tourist alone and was only asking about a student
11 visa, however, during a follow-up consult, John
12 revealed to the attorney, he couldn't go back to his
13 home country in Africa where he had been attacked at
14 a political demonstration brutally and was
15 hospitalized. He feared for his life and had to
16 flee. Unfortunately due to complications with his
17 foreign citizenship, John was not eligible for
18 asylum. However, NMICs legal team pivoted to a new
19 strategy and successfully represented John in the
20 special immigrant juvenile status application.

21 After several years of representation and
22 advocacy, John finally received his green card this
23 January. He also recently earned his Associate
24 Degree in Computer Science from Bronx Community
25 College. MOIA's concept paper will effectively end

1
2 the Action NYC program and will render NMIC and other
3 community nonprofits unable to provide the vital
4 long-term support necessary for clients like John.
5 The only way to preserve life changing funding in
6 immigrant legal programs is to – the only way to
7 preserve life changing immigrant legal programs is to
8 ensure a stable infrastructure of funding in the
9 city.

10 Thank you again for your time and support and we
11 look forward to continuing to partner with the City
12 Council to ensure our immigrant communities are
13 welcomed and supported.

14 ALEXANDRA RIZIO: Thank you to the Committee and
15 Chair Avilés for inviting testimony today. My name
16 is Alex Rizio, I am the Managing Attorney for Policy
17 and Partnerships at Safe Passage Project, a non-
18 profit legal services organization that provides free
19 legal representation to immigrant children facing
20 deportation.

21 We currently serve over 1,300 children who live
22 in the five boroughs of New York City and the two
23 counties of Long Island. Safe Passage works closely
24 with partner organizations through the I Care
25 Coalition with the goal of providing high quality

1
2 legal representation to as many unaccompanied minors
3 as possible. We continue to stand ready to serve
4 children facing deportation but we have a long
5 waiting list of potential clients as cases currently
6 take five to seven years to complete.

7 Once we accept the clients case, we stick with
8 them through their cases end, which is hopefully a
9 green card. As you know, no immigrant, not even a
10 child is appointed a lawyer in immigration court. If
11 a child cannot afford to hire a lawyer, they're
12 forced to defend themselves alone against a trained
13 government prosecutor and a judge with deportation
14 back to dangerous conditions as the likely outcome.

15 Safe Passage helps correct this injustice by
16 providing free attorney's to kids. Beyond legal
17 services, our social work team addresses the broader
18 needs of clients such as school enrollment, housing,
19 access to healthcare, psychological services and
20 public benefits. We received funding from the City
21 Council through the UMFI funding stream and New York
22 State as well as private foundations and donors.

23 Unaccompanied minors are not generally buffed to
24 New York City, instead they're processed by the
25 federal office of refugee resettlement and are

1 ultimately released to live with family members who
2 already reside in New York. In other words,
3 unaccompanied minors will arrive in New York to
4 reunite with family regardless of what certain
5 governors do. Because of conditions in their home
6 countries, the numbers of unaccompanied minors
7 arriving in New York have increased steadily over the
8 past several years.

9
10 Here, they encounter a backlog court system and
11 hardline immigration policies. Despite the increase
12 in the number of youth who require legal services,
13 the City Council has not increased our coalitions
14 funding in several years. Legal service providers
15 are already at capacity with caseloads that approach
16 the unsustainable. We need resources to develop
17 long-term hiring plans, time to scale up services,
18 and to recruit and train attorneys and we need to be
19 able to plan for the five to seven years it takes for
20 cases start to finish.

21 We have the expertise to accomplish this but need
22 increased investment from government entities to make
23 it happen. We're asking the City Council to continue
24 to fund this important work and we are asking
25 individual Council Members to consider additional

1
2 support through local and youth discretionary funding
3 or other legal services initiatives.

4 In the face of extreme court dysfunction and
5 backlogs, nonprofits like Safe Passage Project are
6 ready to continue providing human centered trauma
7 informed services for our clients. Thanks.

8 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you all for your
9 testimony and the work you do and your patience in
10 sitting through the hearing, noted.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much to this
12 panel for your testimony. We'll now call up our next
13 in-person panel. We'll hear from Lena Cohen, Ira
14 Yankwitt, Sierra Kraft, Vladimir Martinez, and Sophie
15 Dalsimer. [04:02:10]- [04:02:56] You may begin when
16 you are ready.

17 IRA YANKWITT: Good afternoon Chair Avilés. My
18 name is Ira Yankwitt and I am the Executive Director
19 of the Literacy Assistance Center. I'm also a proud
20 member of the New York City Coalition for Adult
21 Literacy.

22 As you know, DYCD currently has an open RFP that
23 will fund community-based organizations to lead adult
24 basic education, high school equivalency and English
25 speakers of other language programs for the next

1 three to six years. DYCD has structured this RFP to
2 prioritize residents of the highest poverty, lowest
3 educational attainment, most limited English
4 proficient neighborhoods in the city. We
5 unequivocally support this goal. Unfortunately, the
6 way DYCD has structured the RFP through a two-tier
7 funding competition could effectively render up to 70
8 percent of the current community-based adult literacy
9 providers noncompetitive, forcing them to close their
10 classes and displace thousands of the very students
11 that DYCD is aiming to serve. We are grateful to you
12 Council Member Avilés, as well as the Council
13 Members, and every single member of this Committee
14 and the 32 additional Council Members who signed on
15 to your letter urging DYCD to revise this
16 counterproductive competition model and to extend the
17 proposed deadline. The irony is that while DYCD
18 wants to address neighborhoods with the highest
19 needs, the \$11.85 million in funding in this RFP is
20 \$5 million less than the \$16.83 million in the
21 Administration side funding for DYCD adult literacy
22 contracts in FY24.
23

24 This means that this RFP will serve just over
25 9,100 students annually, a significant decrease from

1
2 the 16,000 plus that DYCD reported serving in FY23
3 and less than one half of one percent of the \$2.2
4 million adult New Yorkers in need.

5 At the same time, the Mayor's Preliminary Budget
6 for FY25 includes \$21.7 million for DYCD adult
7 literacy. Nearly \$10 million or 85 percent more than
8 what is currently included in the RFP. If this
9 additional funding could get baselined and included
10 in the RFP, DYCD could do some combination of the
11 following three things.

12 First, it could increase the per student funding
13 rate, which would make it more realistic for smaller
14 organizations, those that don't have additional
15 sources of revenue to supplement the DYCD funding to
16 apply under this RFP and to be able to provide more
17 comprehensive services.

18 Second, it could increase the number of
19 Neighborhood Tabulation Areas or NTAs designated for
20 funding and increase the number of students through
21 the RFP. Third, it could create a second non-NTA
22 based competition for providers who wish to run
23 boroughwide and or citywide programs and increase the
24 number of students served through this RFP.

1
2 With the March 20th deadline for organizations to
3 submit proposals fast approaching, we urge this
4 committee to get clarity on the funding and push for
5 baselining of the full \$21.7 million as well as to
6 continue to push to fix the competition model and
7 extend the deadline further. Thank you for your
8 attention.

9 LENA COHEN: Good afternoon Chair Avilés. My
10 name is Lena Cohen, I am here representing United
11 Neighborhood Houses. Thank you for the opportunity
12 to speak today. UNH is a policy and social change
13 organization. We represent 46 settlement houses, 40
14 of which are in New York City and all together our
15 members touch the lives of 765,000 New Yorkers each
16 year. Today, I want to draw your attention to
17 critical issues affecting our city's immigrant
18 population and I want to begin with adult literacy
19 education.

20 With nearly one million adults in New York City
21 lacking proficiency in English, DYCD has a chance to
22 address this through its open RFP, which I know that
23 you're familiar with Chair. However, its two-tiered
24 structure, which my colleague Ira just walked through
25 may inadvertently exclude many current providers.

1
2 Jeopardizing services for thousands of learners. We
3 recognize DYCD's efforts to increase adult literacy
4 services in parts of the city that may never have had
5 them before. But we cannot do that at the expense of
6 the current students that are utilizing these
7 programs.

8 In light of increasing demand for literacy
9 services, especially with new asylum seekers in the
10 city, we must focus on growing the system overall
11 rather than rearranging resources. Furthermore, our
12 immigrant families face a dire need for affordable
13 childcare. We're grateful to the Council for
14 supporting the Promise NYC program, which has been a
15 lifeline offering subsidized childcare to
16 undocumented children but funding is set to expire
17 leaving families in their state of limbo, which
18 they're in right now. So, we're asking the city to
19 invest \$20 million in the fiscal year 2025 budget to
20 sustain Promise NYC.

21 Additionally, the 60-day limit on shelter stays
22 for asylum seeking families has really exacerbated
23 changes. As I know you're familiar with, we've seen
24 it disrupt children's education. We've seen it
25 disrupt family stability. We urge the city to

1
2 provide additional support, including transportation
3 assistance and streamlined enrollment processes to
4 ensure these families receive the care they deserve.

5 So, in closing, thank you again for this
6 opportunity to speak. UNH is proud to stand with our
7 partners and urging the City Council to continue
8 putting pressure on DYCD to make sure that this forth
9 coming adult literacy procurement is as successful as
10 we need it to be. And we look forward to
11 collaborating on early childhood education and
12 ensuring that families have a stable path forward to
13 stay in the city. Thank you.

14 Good afternoon. Thank you Chairperson Avilés and
15 Immigration Committee for inviting testimony. My
16 name is Sierra Kraft and I am the Executive Director
17 at the I Care Coalition. We're a coalition of legal
18 service organizations providing free representation
19 to unaccompanied immigrant children facing
20 deportation in New York City while advocating for
21 universal access to Council.

22 So, New York Continues to rank 4th in the highest
23 in the country for the number of unaccompanied
24 arrivals with over 8,500 young New Yorkers arriving
25 annually. And every year thousands of children

1 including infants are placed in removal proceedings
2 up against a trained lawyer if they cannot find or
3 afford an attorney and without representation, they
4 stand a mere 15 percent chance of winning their
5 cases, resulting in rapid deportation back to
6 countries where their lives are at risk and this is
7 even if they have a viable form of relief.
8

9 With support from City Council through the
10 unaccompanied minors and families initiative, since
11 2014 you've made it possible for the I Care providers
12 to stand alongside over 12,000 young immigrants
13 defending them from deportation.

14 Children represented by I Care attorneys have
15 over a 90 percent success rate, providing them the
16 opportunity to pursue higher education, meaningful
17 careers and take on leadership roles in the city they
18 now call home. Our providers have decades of
19 experience in providing culturally responsive and
20 trauma informed services to this vulnerable
21 population. And I Care attorneys, as we've heard
22 from some of our colleagues and providers already,
23 they are on the frontlines every day defending
24 immigrant rights and upholding New Yorks values.
25 However, we have not received an increase in funding

1
2 for over five years now. While thousands of young
3 immigrants await legal support, our waitlists are out
4 of control and they remain vulnerable to detention as
5 we speak.

6 So, today, I'm here to urgently call upon the
7 Immigration Committee to prioritize funding for the
8 many unaccompanied minors in New York City who are
9 reliant on I Cares critical legal services. Our
10 coalition comprises of seven providers that
11 collectively are seeking \$4.9 million this year and
12 are ready to serve nearly 1,700 children and families
13 through legal screenings, know your rights trainings,
14 direct representation and referrals to city and
15 social services. But we need your support and
16 advocacy to ensure that we're not putting these young
17 people in harms way.

18 Now more than ever, it is critical that we stand
19 in solidarity with children seeking safety protection
20 and a new life in this country. We look forward to
21 our continued partnership with you to ensure our
22 values as a sanctuary city. Thank you for your
23 attention and commitment to upholding the wellbeing
24 of the vulnerable members of our community.

1
2 SOPHIE DALSIMER: Good afternoon Chair Aviles.
3 My name is Sophie Dalsimer and I am Co Director of
4 the Health Justice Program at New York Lawyers for
5 the Public Interest. We are privileged to be a part
6 of the Council's immigrant health initiative and we
7 thank you for your support. Today, I am here to ask
8 the Council to continue your support and enhancing
9 funding for the immigrant health initiative, which
10 has saved lives and improved health outcomes across
11 the city.

12 Continued and enhanced funding is critical given
13 the increased arrival of immigrants to our city and
14 the regular deployment of immigration policy as a
15 political bargaining chip on both national and local
16 skills. In particular, we want to commend this
17 Committee for pushing back on the Mayor's callus
18 shelter eviction rules and we'd like to highlight
19 some of the health implications of these policies.

20 Specifically as advocates for immigrant access to
21 healthcare, we are concerned about people losing
22 access to health insurance after enrollment if they
23 forced to relocate and then miss receiving notices to
24 complete the enrollment process. We are also
25 concerned about people losing access to health

1
2 services or being unable to receive care due to a
3 lack of a stable address. For example, we have
4 already seen an individual who is a recently arrived
5 immigrant living with kidney failure who is unable to
6 continue accessing care even though he had been
7 insured, enrolled in health insurance and also could
8 not access translate care without a stable address.

9 I'd also like to note that through our intakes we
10 have heard reports of vary inconsistent policies when
11 it comes to gaining appointments at the city run
12 application, asylum application support centers
13 across the shelters. The city must continue to
14 uphold access to healthcare for all New Yorkers,
15 including those served by our programs such as people
16 who identify as transgender or gender expansive and
17 those living with HIV and those who are undocumented
18 and uninsured. And New Yorkers who are detained by
19 ICE.

20 The needs of these communities are as great as
21 ever and with the newly anticipated budget surplus,
22 meeting these needs is firmly within reach. Thank
23 you again for your continued support and the
24 opportunity to speak today.

1
2 VLADIMIR MARTINEZ: Good afternoon Chair Avilés.
3 Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is
4 Vladimir. My pronouns are he and him and I am the
5 Director of Policy and Government Affairs at the LGBT
6 Community Center in New York City.

7 New York City's LGBT community forum, the LGBT
8 Center in 1983 in response to the AIDs epidemic,
9 ensuring a place for LGBTQ plus people to access
10 information, care, and support that they were not
11 receiving elsewhere. We are constantly in that
12 moment again with the city.

13 Now, we are the largest LGBT multi-service
14 organization on the East Coast and we see almost
15 6,000 weekly visitors through our doors and host over
16 400 community group meetings each month. Our written
17 testimony has more information about our work but I'm
18 going to skip to some of the more salient points
19 here.

20 First, we want to just highlight that immigration
21 is an LGBTQ+ issue. Over the last two years, the
22 center in close partnership with the New York State
23 LGBT Health and Human Services Network which is
24 administered by the center has been working to
25 identify and highlight the needs and concerns facing

1
2 LGBTQ+ immigrants in New York City and across our
3 state, and to find short- and long-term solutions to
4 those issues.

5 Of course, that work has taken new form and new
6 and more urgent forms over the last couple of months
7 due to the growing humanitarian crisis our city faces
8 by new New Yorkers and the supports needed to keep
9 those families and individuals safe and able to
10 integrate into our communities. Our communities are
11 facing challenges that include a general lack of
12 access to services due to increased backlogs, food
13 insecurity, housing insecurity and I'll just note in
14 the housing insecurity space, many LGBTQ folks are
15 facing discrimination from others that are housed
16 with them but also from city staff as they are
17 staying in city staff as they are staying in city
18 shelters, and that is obviously unacceptable for us.

19 Our communities are also facing employment
20 insecurity and discrimination based on immigration
21 status but also based on their identification as a
22 member of the LGBTQ+ community, transportation
23 issues, navigation issues around health insurance,
24 work authorization and other public benefits. Issues
25 accessing IDNYC which I will point out as a program

1
2 specifically meant to address the needs of immigrants
3 and LGBTQ+ people. That intersection is important
4 and of course alarming rates of xenophobia in the
5 media and across New York City.

6 Just this year, we began working with a broad
7 coalition of New York City organizations that exist
8 at the intersection of immigration and LGBTQ+ issues
9 and service provision to outline a plan for tackling
10 the specific challenges faced by LGBTQ+ newly arrived
11 immigrants. We are in the early stages of our work
12 but will look to partner with the City Council to
13 help our city correct course on this important
14 matter. And I know my time is up but most
15 immediately, we're calling on the City Council and
16 the Mayor to increase existing funding lines and
17 agency spending and I will list a few specific
18 Council initiatives that you may look at. The Youth
19 and Poverty Initiative, the Trans Equity Initiative
20 and the Hate Crimes Prevention Initiative are well
21 placed for increases.

22 Because we are continuing to serve communities
23 based – we don't discriminate based on folks
24 immigration status, so our organization and many
25 organizations here are continuing to serve folks with

1
2 the current funding we are receiving but that
3 obviously is not a sustainable way to move forward.
4 Thank you very much.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you to the entire
6 panel and again, we hear this consistent threat of
7 funding having been not baselined, consistent
8 regardless of the increasing need, the increasing
9 costs of goods and services and appropriately paying
10 people for their work. So, we hear, I hear this huge
11 challenge. We must do better as a city and look at
12 where we are placing our money on. Because we seem
13 to be yesterday I learned it costs over \$500,000 to
14 detain someone in Rikers Island. That is not a good
15 use of taxpayer dollars. We have all the services
16 here that we need, that produce safety and support
17 and provide dignity. We have to do better at
18 adjusting our budget to where we really need to
19 focus, so thank you for your work.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much to this
21 panel for your testimony. We will now call our final
22 in person panel which will consist of Ana Galeana,
23 Vianey Romero-Mendez, Kimberly Vega, and Dmitri
24 Daniel Glinski. If you are here to testify in person
25 and I have not called your name yet, please visit the

1
2 Sergeants table and complete a witness slip now even
3 if you registered to testify online. So, with that
4 as well, Loraina Crusius (SP?) if you're here to
5 testify, please complete a witness slip. [04:19:30]-
6 [04:19:34] And you may begin when ready.

7 ABIGAIL DORCIN: My name is Abigail Dorcin and I
8 am the Organizing Manager of La Colmena. La Colmena
9 is an immigrant and workers rights center based on
10 Staten Island that focuses on empowering the
11 immigrant worker through education, culture and
12 organizing. We form part of the day laborer and
13 domestic worker initiative. Through these two
14 initiatives we provide supports to day laborers and
15 domestic workers. We have been in the forefront for
16 many emergencies such a when COVID-19 hit our city or
17 when the city needs support when there are severe
18 weather conditions. But in general, our work allows
19 us to be there for the community when we are needed
20 the most.

21 Recently, our work has allowed us to be on the
22 forefront to support our new neighbors. For example,
23 our centers have seen thousands of new arrivals this
24 past year, meanwhile supporting long term immigrants
25 who have been here for years. We support new

1
2 arrivals by providing them with construction classes
3 OSHA SSC, scaffolding, flagger training.

4 Furthermore, we provide childcare and cleaning
5 services training and also provide know your rights
6 workshops to let them know about their rights at the
7 job site plus provide legal services in ESL classes.
8 However, one of the most important things that we
9 provide is a community.

10 It is beautiful to hear directly from new
11 arrivals that they feel supported. That they feel
12 part of a community. That they feel like a silent
13 lender. We do this work despite the challenges that
14 we face each time on Staten Island by MT Immigrants
15 Group. However, through this Council support, we
16 have been able to keep moving forward and provide
17 these services to both new arrivals and long-term
18 immigrants.

19 It is important for this Council to continue
20 supporting La Colmena, so Staten Island is supported.
21 Thank you Chairwoman for this opportunity to testify
22 on behalf of Staten Island today.

23 VIANEY ROMERO-MENDEZ: Good afternoon esteemed
24 Chair Avilés. Thank you for this opportunity to
25 testify. I am Vianey Romero-Mendez, Director of

1
2 Programs at Mixteca Organization. I stand here today
3 before you to highlight the invaluable support of our
4 organization, distending to the Latinx and indigenous
5 immigrant community in Sunset Park Brooklyn and
6 Greater New York City.

7 As you consider the distribution of the resources
8 in the forthcoming budget, I urge you to acknowledge
9 Mixteca's critical role in providing essential
10 services to our immigrant neighbors. As an immigrant
11 myself, I am deeply – I deeply understand the
12 significance of organizations like Mixteca and
13 supporting and serving marginalized communities.
14 Reflecting on my own journey and my parents struggles
15 upon arriving in this vibrant city. I firmly wish
16 for a resource like Mixteca to lean on for support.

17 Mixteca services serves as a beacon of hope and
18 assistance for countless immigrants offering guidance
19 through bureaucratic processes, language assistance
20 and cultural support. Currently, we are seeing data
21 of assisting approximately 150 to 200 individuals
22 weekly, addressing basic needs like toiletries, food,
23 clothing, adult literacy, workforce development and
24 mental health services among many more. Mixteca's
25 holistic approach is noted in understanding the

1
2 unique experiences of Latinx and indigenous
3 immigrants, ensuring services are tailored to their
4 needs. However, our capacity to serve is limited by
5 space, therefore we seek expansion to meet growing
6 demands. In considering resource allocations and
7 implore you to prioritize funding for Mixteca, we are
8 a frontline organization, vital in providing services
9 to our immigrant community. Your support is
10 essential in obtaining capital funding for expand and
11 continue deliver culturally competent services.

12 We welcome the opportunity to collaborate future,
13 ensuring every member of our community has the
14 resources to thrive in New York City. Thank you for
15 your attention to this pressing matter.

16 ANA GALEANA: Good afternoon to all the members
17 of the New York City Council. My name is Ana Galeana
18 and I am a single mom of five kids. I came to this
19 country when I was 17 years old, looking for a better
20 life and like many immigrants, I faced many
21 difficulties. The language, the culture, and even
22 the food were not the same. Trying to feed in a
23 foreign country has been the biggest challenge of my
24 life but when my kids were born, difficult [INAUDIBLE
25 04:24:38].

1
2 It was hard to navigate the system because I
3 didn't know the language and I had no idea about the
4 resources that were available for immigrants like me.
5 I am a DB survivor and in spite of trauma in the
6 difficult system my family and I went through, I went
7 back to school, got my GED, then my Associates and
8 finally, last year my bachelor's degree. All of that
9 would not be possible without the help of my
10 community surrounding me. I received support and
11 information from teachers of my kids on how to get my
12 GED. My GED teacher gave me information about
13 colleges. My DB therapists gave me information about
14 scholarships and the rest is history.

15 All of that was possible because of an
16 organization like Mixteca exists. During the
17 pandemic in 2020, I arrived in Mixteca seeking help.
18 2020 was a difficult year for everyone and many
19 immigrant families suffered. I was desperate because
20 I reached a point in which I didn't have enough money
21 to pay rent or buy food. In Mixteca, I received the
22 support that I needed. They were able to provide the
23 community with resources such as boxes of food.
24 Mixteca does vital work within the community.

1
2 After seeing the amazing work they do, I started
3 getting involved as a volunteer and now, I can
4 proudly say I am part of the team as an advocate. I
5 am happy to give back to the community the same
6 support that I received when I needed it. And as an
7 advocate, I know it can make the difference in
8 someone's life. Thanks to Mixteca, our community can
9 have access to resources that can change their lives
10 just as they change mine. I ask that you please
11 consider the support in Mixteca and similar
12 organizations that bring a helping hand to immigrant
13 communities. Thank you.

14 DMITRI DANIEL GLINSKI: Good afternoon. I am
15 Dmitri Daniel Glinski, Keeper and CEO of Russian
16 Speaking Community Council. A 12-year-old CBO based
17 organization based in Washington Heights, now serving
18 asylum seekers from across the city. So, thank you
19 for this opportunity and I really mean that because
20 having spoken here maybe ten times over the past
21 decade, I know of no other venue, where we or others
22 from our community can be heard by our city
23 government and other CBOs on a regular basis.

24 So, today for us is really about raising
25 awareness of our core constituents here. That is a

1 subset of immigrants from dictatorships, mainly
2 Russia and refugees from Ukraine and other countries
3 named by [INAUDIBLE 04:27:10].

4
5 By exiles, we mean those who have to leave their
6 countries because of having stood up for democracy
7 and human rights. For lawyers around here, strong
8 asylum cases and yes, this rapidly growing segment
9 and population and their CBOs here in New York have
10 to often be muted by business partners and
11 beneficiaries of their oppressors. That is of their
12 old cause of migration. For many years, this direct
13 and indirect enablers of foreign [INAUDIBLE 04:27:39]
14 have yielded influence in New Yorks real estate,
15 housing prices, in finance law and all philanthropies
16 and other agencies involved with Russian Americans.

17 In ethnic media, at times in some government
18 offices mainly in parts of South Brooklyn, meanwhile
19 we at RCC and similar projects had no advance for
20 paid staff for nearly 12 years but we were never
21 going to quit our organizing and advocacy. Last
22 year, our persistence got rewarded with success.
23 Partnership with Catholic Charities. This has been a
24 true blessing and a historic breakthrough for the
25

1
2 community. It finally lets us serve people like us
3 on a professional basis, at least part time for now.

4 We are providing benefit screening, navigation
5 and referrals, know your rights and pro se legal
6 information. We actually have published online a pro
7 bono handbook in Russian for asylum seekers, first
8 ever in collaboration from AOL and on occasion, we
9 provide free food, clothes and metro cards.

10 We are seeing asylum seekers from all form of
11 countries and of course we're open to serving all
12 others. This is thanks to the New York State OTDA
13 funding. We haven't had any funds originating from
14 the city for seven years. I also thank Lutheran
15 Church of our Savors for generously providing space
16 for our services. I urge the Council to expand and
17 certainly not to cut support for Catholic Churches
18 programming, especially long-term capacity building
19 as their services and contracting are the most
20 inclusive of the widest range of immigrants that
21 we've ever seen.

22 And finally back to the exiles. In the spirit of
23 what they have said, I know this is unrelated maybe
24 to the main topic, but I submitted a petition
25 launched by others to co-name the strip of land next

1 to the Russian consulate and [INAUDIBLE 04:29:23].
2
3 Not just for discourage and sacrifice but for the
4 thousands of Russian immigrant New Yorkers and not
5 only them, other Americans who are arriving for his
6 release. We are aware of the community boards
7 process for this but we urge Council Members to also
8 find ways to help this get done. Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you to this panel and
10 particular shout out to Mixteca who is in my
11 community and I see first hand the work that they do
12 every day with so much dignity, grace and love. And
13 La Colmena, you all in Staten Island which you really
14 belong to me in Brooklyn but thank you all for your
15 testimony and your testimony of doing this work for
16 so many years without having received any support
17 from anyone and your perseverance to continue and not
18 to quit is the story of resilience of all our
19 communities and we share that and hope – we must do
20 better to make sure we get all the full support to
21 support all the communities that come here and call
22 home. So, I thank you for your testimony and this
23 continued advocacy to do better. And living to our
24 ideals as a country right or celebrate human rights
25 and dignity for all, so thank you.

1
2 DMITRI DANIEL GLINSKI: Thank you so much for
3 your kind words and we'll certainly be very grateful
4 for operation support wherever it can come from.

5 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much to this
7 panel for your testimony. We will now turn to
8 testimony on Zoom. For virtual panelists, once your
9 name is called, a member of our staff will unmute you
10 and the Sergeant at Arms will set the timer and give
11 you the go ahead to begin.

12 Please wait for the Sergeant to announce that you
13 may begin before delivering your testimony. We will
14 now hear testimony from Rex Chen followed by Melissa
15 Chua, followed by Oriana Shulevitz Rosado.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

17 REX CHEN: My name is Rex Chen. My pronouns are
18 he, him. I am the Immigration Director at Legal
19 Services NYC and I'm going to cover three points. My
20 first point is that we're doing immigration services
21 but much more than just immigration services, with
22 critical help from our social workers, our team meets
23 asylum seekers and helps them on a wide range of
24 issues. It could be education enrollment. We're
25 doing things with public benefits. We also have a

1
2 lot of housing lawyers working on issues. Asylum
3 seekers have many needs to be able to win the legal
4 protections that they qualify for. Disruptions such
5 as the 30, 60-day rule for the shelters makes things
6 much harder for them, also makes it harder for us who
7 is trying to help them on their cases.

8 My second point is that LSNYC if we just focus on
9 our immigration work, we're helping many people. We
10 help thousands of New Yorkers every year. In 2020,
11 there were 25,000 people in the households that
12 received our immigration help.

13 And my third thing is that I want to point out
14 that we are actually trying to tackle some of the new
15 complex immigration issues and develop resources for
16 our staff and others in the field. Last year, we
17 filed lawsuits to try to help asylum seekers who have
18 been stuck in an infinite way to get an asylum
19 interview. The government agreed to set asylum
20 interviews for more than 20 of our clients who were
21 stuck in that back log. In a few weeks we're
22 actually giving a training to try to address how
23 immigration judges have an anti-Black bias when they
24 make their rulings including in asylum cases.

1
2 We're going to train immigration lawyers to say
3 something in court to immigration judges to interrupt
4 their unconscious bias before they make their ruling
5 and we plan to share our materials with immigration
6 lawyers around the country. And we're also giving
7 trainings over Zoom to hundreds of people on
8 different immigration issues. So far this year, I'll
9 mention two trainings we've already done. My
10 teammates gave a training on preparing for asylum
11 interviews. About 150 people came and with the help
12 of one call, one of my co-workers gave a training on
13 winning immigration at fields and around 100 people
14 came to that.

15 So, those are my three main points, which are
16 that we're helping with much more than just
17 immigration when we do immigration work. We help so
18 many people every year and we're working on very
19 ambitious projects.

20 If I - in closing, I'll just mention that one
21 issue we've heard today is the need to be strategic
22 and we can see that there's a need to ramp up legal
23 services for long term representation beyond quick
24 pro se services. And I think that's very important,
25 that ship needs to start now because if it doesn't

1
2 start now, it actually could cost a premium to the
3 city if it's not prepared, and it sees the need and
4 then suddenly it has to quickly hire many people to
5 work on the need. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much for your
8 testimony. We'll next hear from Melissa Chua
9 followed by Oriana Schulevitz Rosado followed by
10 Carlyn Cowen.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

12 MELISSA CHUA: Thank you. Chair Avilés, Council
13 Members and staff, thank you and good afternoon.
14 Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today
15 about the preliminary budget for next year. My name
16 is Melissa Chua and I am the Co-Director of the
17 Immigrant Protection Unit at the New York Legal
18 Assistance Group NYLAG. I do not need to reemphasize
19 to this Committee the numbers of new New Yorkers that
20 have arrived since April of 2022.

21 At NYLAG we have stretched our existing services
22 to meet the needs of newly arrived immigrants and
23 have alongside with our community-based organizations
24 on the ground created new and dynamic programming to
25

1
2 provide quality services to as many people as
3 possible.

4 For example, as my colleague at Unlocal has
5 discussed, NYLAG along with our partners have served
6 thousands of individuals through the Pro Se Plus
7 Project and we are providing highly complex, time
8 sensitive services to newly arrived immigrants who
9 are already post-deportation order to the Rapid
10 Response Legal Collaborative. While the city has
11 invested heavily in an infrastructure aimed solely at
12 providing pro se assistance, the initial application
13 for asylum is merely the first step to securing long
14 term stability and protection for families.

15 The process of winning asylum and maintaining
16 work authorization is a long and complex one that
17 requires assistance and intervention along the way.
18 Programs like the Pro Se Plus Project and the full
19 representation offered to the Immigrant Opportunities
20 Initiative, are crucial for ensuring that families do
21 not only apply but win asylum. This is necessary for
22 ensuring that individuals maintain their ability to
23 work and gain stability.

24 Similarly NYLAG and the Rapid Response Legal
25 Collaborative continue to receive referrals as has

1
2 been discussed, many directly from the Asylum Seeker
3 Center for individuals who have been ordered to be
4 removed through no fault of their own or after pro se
5 proceedings that are legally deficient and void a
6 reprocess. Notwithstanding programs like the Rapid
7 Response Legal Collaborative face continuing cuts,
8 even if the need for our services has increased
9 dramatically. Our programming serving existing new
10 New Yorkers similarly faces dire cuts. For example,
11 the proposed RFP for Action NYC would end NYLAG's
12 legal services in H+H hospitals through the city
13 cutting off services to thousands of New Yorkers. In
14 fact this is one of the very programs cited by MOIA
15 earlier as one of the few nonprofits serving
16 children.

17 The proposed RFP for Action NYC would also
18 endanger NYLAGs ability to provide wide ranging legal
19 services to some of the most underserved and long
20 residing immigrant communities in New York City.
21 Having worked with immigrants in New York City for
22 many years, we encourage the city to continue and
23 increase investment in legal services and community-
24 based organizations that have the expertise to
25 provide long term effective -

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2 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time has expired.

3 MELISSA CHUA: Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you so much for your
5 testimony and your work.

6 ORIANA SHULEVITZ ROSADO: Hello. Good afternoon.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Good afternoon.

8 ORIANA SHULEVITZ ROSADO: Members of New York
9 City Council, my name is Oriana Shulevitz Rosado. I
10 am the Policy and Advocacy Strategist at Immigrant
11 ARC. Immigrant ARC is a coalition of over 80 member
12 organizations that provide legal services across the
13 state of New York. I am here to advocate for the
14 urgent and crucial need for our city to fund long-
15 term immigration legal services and get us out of
16 this cyclical emergency state.

17 The arrival of our new neighbors is an
18 opportunity to build long-term immigration legal
19 infrastructure that would benefit both new migrants
20 and existing immigrant communities. The way our
21 city's administration is currently handling this
22 typical increase in new arrivals, legal service
23 providers are forced into states of emergency. Legal
24 service providers across the five boroughs have
25 attempted to rise to this challenge, making herculean

1
2 efforts to come together to provide rapid response
3 services.

4 Our members, other legal service organizations,
5 and the city are hosting many small, temporary rapid-
6 response clinics across the city. These clinics meet
7 an important need but they do not provide migrants
8 with long-time representation which could be a huge
9 issue since the majority of asylum applications
10 require follow up. Pairing rapid response efforts
11 with long term legal representations and wraparound
12 services is the only viable solution to ensure
13 migrants do not fall through the cracks in our
14 immigration process. Immigrant ARC recommends that
15 what is needed to meet this moment is greater
16 transparency from city agencies, strategic
17 coordination from the city and state governments with
18 legal service providers and community-based
19 organizations and funding for long term immigration
20 legal services, which includes the following:

21 Investing \$58 million for immigration legal
22 services, which goes to the following citywide
23 initiatives: \$31million for the Mayor's Immigrant
24 Opportunities Initiative, which have been threatened
25 by budget cuts, including such crucial programs like

1
2 the Action NYC and the Rapid Response Legal
3 Collaborative; \$6.6 million to NYIFUP, a first-in-
4 the-nation program that provides free immigration
5 legal services to low-income New Yorkers; \$4.9
6 million for I Care, which provides representation to
7 unaccompanied minors and families in removal
8 proceedings; \$3.3 million for CUNY Citizenship Now,
9 which provides legal services to people on their path
10 to citizenship; and \$2.6 million for the City
11 Council's Immigrant Opportunities Initiatives.

12 Separately, there is a need in investing \$20 million
13 to support immigration legal services and another \$1
14 million in a pilot program to provide immigration
15 legal service clients with wraparound and holistic
16 case management services. This situation is only a
17 crisis because our city's Administration makes it
18 one. New York City will always be a home to
19 immigrants. If we work with our legal service
20 providers and properly fund immigration services, we
21 can ensure that our city continues to flourish.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time is expired.

23 ORIANA SHULEVITZ ROSADO: Its immigrant
24 communities. Thank you.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you so much for your
3 testimony.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin. You may begin.

5 CARLYN COWEN: Good afternoon everyone. My name
6 is Carlyn Cowen. My pronouns are they, them and I'm
7 the Chief Policy and Public Affairs Officer of the
8 Chinese American Planning Council, CPC. CPC serves
9 over 80,000 Asian American immigrant and low-income
10 New Yorkers in all 59 neighborhoods of New York City
11 each year. Thank you so much Chair Avilés and the
12 Council for the opportunity to testify at today's
13 hearing.

14 While many of my colleagues have listed a number
15 of important immigrant serving initiatives that we at
16 CPC support greatly, I want to uplift a couple in
17 particular and the full list is included in our
18 written testimony that we are submitting. First up,
19 Promise NYC. CPC is one of the designated sites for
20 Promise NYC and we have been working with
21 undocumented families including asylum seeker
22 families and families in Queens help them as well for
23 childcare. One of our community members came to us
24 from Venezuela and she became because her oldest
25 child could not get necessary life saving medical

1
2 treatment and since then she has been able to help
3 her child get the lifesaving medication and treatment
4 that she needs to survive and has been relying on
5 Promise NYC to be able to work while her child gets
6 treatment and care. This is just one story of many
7 and CPC experienced that we enrolled in fact our
8 community member allotment within the first couple of
9 months and have waiting lists of hundreds of
10 community members long for this critical program.
11 So, we urge the city not only to increase investment
12 to at least \$20 million but also to baseline funding
13 so that families can have that stability year after
14 year.

15 We also want to highlight the changes to the
16 adult literacy program at a time that adult literacy
17 is needed more than ever to continuing welcoming new
18 immigrants to New York City, we've seen the RFP that
19 come out that threatens to cut programs for about 60
20 percent of the current providers by designated
21 preferred neighborhoods in the new RFP program. CPC
22 for example, although we serve community members that
23 live in the identified neighborhood target, we do not
24 have program sites within those neighborhoods, so we

1
2 risk losing slots for 600 community members to learn
3 English.

4 Again, we appreciate that the city is trying to
5 focus on underserved neighborhoods but this can be
6 accomplished by adding additional slots and
7 additional funding for adult literacy, so that
8 community members across our city can be served, not
9 by rearranging and restricting those slots. So, we
10 really encourage the release of the RFP new and also
11 to increase and baseline funding by at least \$21
12 million in adult literacy.

13 In addition to that, we urge the ending of the
14 60-day shelter rule. It has been wreaking havoc on
15 our community members that are coming in and need
16 support. We encourage the increase in legal services
17 funding for our immigrant community members and we
18 encourage investments in the AAPI community support
19 initiative to support Asian American and immigrant
20 New Yorkers. And lastly, we are strong supporters of
21 the Just Pay Initiative because we know that our
22 staff that are working in and out every single day to
23 serve immigrant New Yorkers are not getting paid the
24 wages that they deserve and by adding in a COLA and a
25 wage for our human services workers, we can best

1
2 serve all of our immigrant community members. Thank
3 you again for the opportunity to testify today.

4 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you so much.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very much for your
6 testimony. As a quick reminder for virtual
7 panelists, once your name is called, a member of our
8 staff will unmute you and the Sergeant at Arms will
9 set the timer and give you the go ahead to begin.
10 Please wait for the Sergeant to announce that you may
11 begin before delivering your testimony. We'll next
12 hear from Mohamed Q. Amin followed by Catalina
13 Bustamante(SP?) followed by Alex Martinez.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

15 MOHAMED Q. AMIN: Good afternoon. My name is
16 Mohamed Q. Amin. I am the Founder and Executive
17 Director of the Caribbean Equality Project. On
18 behalf of its 4,000 plus community members and staff,
19 thank you to Chair Alexa Avilés and the community on
20 immigration for holding this hearing and providing
21 this opportunity to testify.

22 Caribbean Equality Project is a New York City
23 based community organization that empowers advocates
24 for and represents Afro and Indo-Caribbean LGBTQ
25 immigrants. We mobilize low income, undocumented

1
2 asylum seekers and working-class Caribbean LGBTQ
3 communities across New York City on immigration,
4 workers rights, healthcare, housing and civic
5 engagement to build political power through
6 culturally responsive educational programming and
7 advocacy.

8 New York City is home to the largest Caribbean
9 foreign born population. Many of whom who live in
10 Caribbean centered neighborhoods like Richmond Hill
11 and South Ozone Park in Queens, Flatbush and Crown
12 Heights in Brooklyn and Castle Hill, Wakefield and
13 Soundview in the Bronx. The Caribbean LGBTQ
14 immigrants we serve face unique challenges and they
15 often do not have access to family and community
16 networks like other immigrant communities. Many of
17 whom have been abandoned by their biological families
18 and/or fleeing prosecution due to anti-LGBTQ violence
19 in their home country. Many of the barriers, queer
20 Caribbean immigrants encounter every day range from
21 lack of access to culturally responsive, immigration
22 legal services to housing and food insecurities.

23 Also, unable to earn income due to their
24 immigration status and refugee status. Many of our
25 communities have been actively engaged in survival

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2 sex work to earn an income, to live and to afford
3 legal services, which disproportionately puts their
4 health and safety in jeopardy.

5 Immigration is and will continue to be an LGBTQ
6 right. The Caribbean Equality Projects, Immigration
7 Justice, LGBTQ, Immigrant Empowerment Initiative
8 addresses the services gap for LGBTQ immigrants in
9 New York City. Newly arrived and existing community
10 members need asylum application, obtaining gender
11 affirming identification through IDNYC, legal name
12 change, housing, clothing, food, financial and adult
13 literacy and HIV and trans healthcare. I am calling
14 on the New York City Council Committee on immigration
15 to invest in funding support for community-based
16 organizations to prioritize community driven
17 solutions to legal immigration services.

18 Caribbean Equality Project is a proud member of
19 the 18 percent and growing campaign, a critical and
20 diverse citywide campaign uniting over 90 AAPI led
21 serving organizations across New York City to fight
22 for a fair and equitable budget that protects the
23 needs of our most vulnerable communities. Caribbean
24 Equality Project urges the New York City Council to
25 uplift the collective priorities of the 18 percent

1
2 and growing campaign which includes expanding AAPI
3 Community Support Initiative to \$7.5 million.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Your time is expired.

5 MOHAMED Q. AMIN: To meet the public non-
6 prophetization fund to \$7.5 million and the Access
7 Health Initiative to \$4 million. Thank you for your
8 time today.

9 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Thank you so much for your
10 testimony.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
12 We'll next hear from Catalina Bustamante and if they
13 are still available on Zoom, Alex Martinez followed
14 by Maria Mohamed Miller. Catalina Bustamante, wait
15 for the Sergeant to give you the go ahead to begin.

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin. You may begin.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Alright, I believe that
18 Catalina Bustamante may have dropped off. I will
19 list the remaining names now just to make sure that
20 we are not missing anyone. Catalina Bustamante, Alex
21 Martinez and Maria Mohamed Miller. If you are still
22 available on Zoom, please use the raised hand
23 function and a member of our staff will call you.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.
25

1
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I see that Catalina
3 Bustamante is back with us. You may begin if you're
4 ready. Catalina Bustamante, if you are currently
5 attempting to testify, we cannot currently hear you
6 in Chambers.

7 I believe we are going to have to move on at this
8 point. We have now heard from everyone who has
9 signed up to testify. If we inadvertently missed
10 anyone who would like to testify in person, please
11 visit the Sergeants table and complete a witness slip
12 now. If we inadvertently missed anyone who would
13 like to testify virtually, please use the raised hand
14 function in Zoom and I will call on you in the order
15 of hands raised. I see Catalina Bustamante with
16 their hand raised. Please wait for the Sergeant to
17 give you the go ahead to begin.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You may begin.

19 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Catalina Bustamante, can you
20 not hear us? Okay.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We're having difficulty
22 hearing from Catalina Bustamante at this time. Uhm,
23 so in that case, seeing no one else with their hand
24 raised in Zoom or present here in person, I would
25 like to note that written testimony, which will be

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2 reviewed in full by Committee staff may be submitted
3 to the record up to 72 hours after the close of this
4 hearing by emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov.

5 And with that, I can turn it back over to Chair
6 Avilés to close us out.

7 CHAIRPERSON AVILÈS: Great, with that, I want to
8 thank everyone for your participation and that
9 concludes this hearing and we want New York City not
10 to do stuff but to do better. Thank you. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date March 27, 2024