

NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

Oversight Hearing: The Experiences of Black Migrants in NYC Before the New York City Council Committees on Immigration and Hospitals

**Testimony of
Commissioner Manel Castro
NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA)**

April 16, 2024

Thank you, Chairs Aviles and Narcisse and the Committees on Immigration and on Hospitals, for holding the first hearing about the experience of Black migrants and uplifting the particular needs of the community and how we may work together to meet those needs.

I am joined by Tom Tortorici, Executive Director of Legal and Support Initiatives at MOIA, Director Molly Schaeffer of OASO, and Aissata Camara, Deputy Commissioner for Policy and Strategic Initiatives and Chief of Staff at the Office of International Affairs.

I want to thank all of the Black immigrant community groups and leaders who work tirelessly in service of the community and of New York City, not just in the last two years, but for decades.

During my time at the New York Immigration Coalition about a decade ago, I worked closely with Black immigrant community groups, such as African Services Committee, Black Alliance for Just Immigration, and African Communities Together, to establish the first Black Immigrant Table, to advocate around the issues we are discussing today and hold government at all levels accountable for those communities that have historically been underserved and neglected.

I had the chance to work alongside many of the groups, as I continue to do now, to fight for comprehensive immigration reform and the need to extend TPS to immigrants from nationalities that should be included in this program. Our immigration system is broken and needs overhauling as it continues to have devastating consequences on our communities.

Unfortunately, we know from very recent studies that Black migrants, regardless of their national origin, face more time in federal immigration detention, pay higher priced immigration bonds, and experience more abuse than other immigrant groups.

The Haitian Response Initiative

First, I would like to highlight our work in response to the arrival of Haitian immigrants to New York City and describe how MOIA works to serve immigrant communities.

MOIA coordinates an innovative program known as the Haitian Response Initiative to meet the needs of newly arrived Haitians. The initiative funds seven Haitian-led community-based organizations to provide case management and social services, and Catholic Charities to provide immigration legal services and capacity building trainings. The Haitian Response Initiative was created in FY22 and nearly \$5 million has been allocated to the program over the past three fiscal years.

Over the life of the program, more than 4,000 recently arrived Haitians have met with HRI caseworkers to determine what services and resources they need to integrate into our city. Case managers have spent thousands of hours following up with community members to determine their eligibility for benefits and connect them to resources and services, including direct cash assistance, food assistance, healthcare, maternal & infant health, school enrollment, housing, mental health services, and legal services.

Additionally, following the federal government's re-designation of Haitian Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in 2023, our HRI partners held TPS clinics around the city, helping hundreds of Haitian community members access both protection from deportation and work authorization. Our proposed budget for FY25 continues to fund this important work, which is especially critical at a time when social upheaval impacts the country, as well as our neighbors in the Haitian diaspora.

The Haitian Response Initiative is a relevant example of MOIA's broader approach to responding to the needs of arriving immigrants and making sure they receive critical information, support, and services. We fund and partner closely with community-based, immigrant-led nonprofit organizations and immigration legal experts who work together to provide culturally and linguistically responsive services in neighborhoods with high concentrations of immigrants. Through our relationships and service initiatives, our community partners also let us know when information or services provided by the City are inaccessible, so that MOIA can work with our sister agencies to address these barriers.

MOIA's Federal Advocacy

With respect to advocacy, MOIA has prioritized federal advocacy efforts for all Black migrants. I stood alongside councilmembers and our Haitian community members to call on the federal government to stop all deportations of Haitian nationals who now call New York City and the

United States their home. Mayor Adams has also made it a priority to call on the federal government to designate or redesignate Cameroon, Mali, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mauritania, and Nigeria for TPS status. These advocacy efforts pushed the federal government to redesignate Cameroonian TPS. We hope to collaborate with the City Council to continue to support Black migrants through both programming and advocacy.

Humanitarian Crisis for Black Migrants

The asylum seeker humanitarian crisis has also demonstrated the evolving needs of Black immigrants. That's why the City has established a support network for asylum seekers across the five boroughs that provides numerous services to asylum seekers, including emergency shelter, social services case management, legal services, workforce development, English classes, and Know-Your-Rights workshops.

During this crisis, the City is in a constant process of responsibly collecting data to track and respond to emerging needs. Due to the varying perspectives on racial identity worldwide, we do not ask folks to self-identify their race at the Arrival Center. What we do know is that given political instability and limits on humanitarian migration to Europe – among other factors – we have seen an increase in West African asylum seekers arriving in our city beginning in the fall of 2023. These asylum seekers presented linguistic diversity and cultural needs that required a tailored approach.

Language Access

I would now like to turn to Language Access, as this is an issue of incredible importance to the black immigrant community.

During the intake process at the Arrival Center, many West African asylum seekers state that their preferred language is French or Arabic. However, when having sensitive legal or medical conversations with shelter staff, it became clear that many were not comfortable verbally communicating in these languages. Their mother tongue, or language of preference, is a language of limited diffusion such as Wolof, Fulani, and Soninke. I saw something very similar during my time at NICE when working with immigrants from Indigenous communities in the Americas, whose mother tongues are Garifuna, Kanjobal, or Quechua. This is an area where we want to show our commitment to language access, which is partly born out of witnessing the struggles of our own immigrant families and communities here in the U.S.

On my first day as MOIA Commissioner, I was in the Bronx responding to the Twin Parks fire that took the lives of seventeen Gambian Americans and left many others homeless. My team was immediately on site helping impacted community members get connected to case management, NYC ID cards, and mental health support. During this time, language access was critical. My team worked with community-based groups on the ground to ensure that information and resources were distributed in Wolof and other languages of limited diffusion.

MOIA's language access team has collaborated with providers to translate materials into these emerging languages. For languages with limited written systems, we have shared best practices with agencies by recording messages that allow asylum seekers to understand important updates and resource availability. Our team also created "I Speak" cards that include languages of West Africa, to better identify preferred languages at entry points, as well as multilingual posters to ensure that newcomers know their rights to receive services in their preferred languages. We believe that our approach of centering language access could become a model for other governments at the state and federal levels to follow.

Additionally, as part of Local Law 6 of 2023, MOIA recently surveyed 69 community-based organizations serving specific constituencies that need language assistance to better understand how the city may be able to increase and support language capacity. We are working with Mayor's Office of Contract Services to facilitate and give better access to city contracts centered on language access.

Interpretation is provided regardless of language at the Asylum Application Help Center and its satellite offices, overseen by the Office of Asylum Seeker Operations. These sites provide *pro se* application assistance for immigrants seeking asylum, temporary protected status, or work authorization.

MOIA's Asylum Seeker Legal Assistance Network (ASLAN) also provides dedicated immigration legal assistance for African migrants through contracts with nonprofit partners rooted in immigrant communities and possessing the linguistic and cultural competencies needed to properly provide service. Immigration legal services for African migrants are provided through regular information sessions and application clinics at African Services Committee, African Communities Together, and on specific days at an East Harlem legal clinic run by Lutheran Social Services of New York. During these clinics, interpretation assistance for African languages of limited diffusion is sourced from local community providers. My office's French and Arabic language access specialists are also available to provide on-site interpretation support during these days. ASLAN partners have also prepared packets of research and information that African asylum seekers can use to support their claims when representing themselves *pro se*.

MOIA's Engagement with CBOs and Faith-Based Organizations

City government alone cannot respond to all the needs of Black migrants. As we plan ahead, the City is developing a strategic plan, including two key pillars that MOIA is leading, which includes, strengthening and growing non-profit capacity with a focus on organizations serving non-traditional populations and advocacy.

That's why the city has also been collaborating with our philanthropic partners to direct resources to reputable community-based and faith-based organizations. Currently, we are in the process of distributing in-kind donations of clothing, toiletries, and baby products to African-serving groups. The MOIA outreach team has two staff members who are Muslim who regularly engage with these communities.

To continue to learn of the evolving needs, my team and I also spend time visiting African serving organizations and mosques. Just two weeks ago I was honored to be welcomed to Darou Salam Islamic Community in the Bronx for an Iftar Celebration. My team and I shared a meal with recent arrivals who described some of their experiences since arriving to our city. Many expressed gratitude to share this meal, telling us that this is the first-time celebrating Ramadan away from home. These meals were provided by MOIA, the Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes, and the Commission on Human Rights, recognizing the importance of welcoming the newest members of our community.

Need for Federal Assistance and Work Authorization

As we continue to work to improve the conditions Black migrants are facing, let's be clear – we need support from the state and federal government. The City continues to advocate to the federal government to take action today on behalf of Black immigrants, including those from West Africa. Our advocacy for TPS continues, with my team actively engaging in several campaigns with representatives from these communities and our national partners.

By strengthening our TPS advocacy and increasing our language access across the city, Black immigrants have the opportunity to achieve their goal of working and contributing to New York City. Last week, Director Schaeffer and I joined Acting U.S. Secretary of Labor Julie Su at a tour of African Communities Together to show our support for workforce development for Black immigrants. Guinean asylum seekers receiving services on-site shared stories of perseverance to arrive in the United States in hopes of providing a better future for their families. As Mayor Adams has stated before, “to deny people the right to work is to deny them the human dignity they deserve.”

City Council Bills and Conclusion

Regarding Intros 84 and 85 introduced by Council Member Rivera, I want to thank the Councilwoman for her trust and confidence in MOIA. I agree to the spirit of these bills but would like to meet with your team at some other point to work through them. As for Intro 739, the Administration is still reviewing the bill and how it would impact overall operations of the asylum seeker response.

Before I finish, I want to take a moment to thank the staff on the ground, doing hard work to support some of our newest immigrants, regardless of race and national origin, as they integrate into our City and our country. None of this would be possible without their tireless work. Many of the public servants doing this work are immigrants or children of immigrants themselves, extending their warmest welcome, not just through words but also through action. I invite everyone in this room to join them. Thank you.

CORDELL CLEARE
30TH SENATE DISTRICT

ALBANY OFFICE
ROOM 905
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12247
PHONE: 518-455-2441

DISTRICT OFFICE
Harlem State Office Building
163 West 125th Street
Suite 912
New York, New York 10027
PHONE: 212-222-7315

EMAIL: CLEARE@NYSenate.GOV



THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK

CHAIR
AGING

COMMITTEES:

BANKS
CITIES 1
CULTURAL AFFAIRS, TOURISM, PARKS & RECREATION
EDUCATION
HOUSING, CONSTRUCTION & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
SOCIAL SERVICES

Testimony Of State Senator Cordell Cleare | New York City Council
Committee On Immigration | Oversight - The Experiences of Black Migrants
in New York City

Good Morning, Chair Avilés and members of the New York City Council Committee On Immigration. I commend you for addressing the incredibly important issue of “The Experiences of Black Migrants in New York City.”

It has been well over two years now that we have been addressing the influx of West African Migrants in Harlem. It has largely been an “invisible” crisis.

We have encountered primarily young men from West African countries, who have different food, language, religious and cultural needs than other migrant populations in the District. However, in my district these African Migrants are eager to work and learn.

We have held numerous community events, coat drives and give-aways, distributed toys and supplies, taken multiple community surveys, as well as the all important task of feeding thousands of these asylum seekers and connecting them to groups and organizations who can help them get support for all aspects of daily living.

As it specifically relates to Introductions 84, 85 739 and Resolution 340, I am in complete support. Surveys are an invaluable tool and one that my office has used to better understand the needs of African Migrants and certainly – based upon the over 700 surveys we have collected – a focus on economic, workforce, health and mental health needs is incredibly important.

In our first community survey of over 300 individuals, we learned the following: The average age of respondents was 28; they were almost 88% male; the great majority identified their country of origin as Guinea or Senegal. Furthermore, 77.1% of respondents spoke French as a primary language. 58.3% of respondents

CORDELL CLEARE
30TH SENATE DISTRICT

ALBANY OFFICE
ROOM 905
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
ALBANY, NEW YORK 12247
PHONE: 518-455-2441

DISTRICT OFFICE
Harlem State Office Building
163 West 125th Street
Suite 912
New York, New York 10027
PHONE: 212-222-7315

EMAIL: CLEARE@NYSenate.GOV



THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK

CHAIR
AGING

COMMITTEES:

BANKS
CITIES 1
CULTURAL AFFAIRS, TOURISM, PARKS & RECREATION
EDUCATION
HOUSING, CONSTRUCTION & COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
SOCIAL SERVICES

spoke either Wolof or Pulaar as a secondary language. Only 17.8% of respondents spoke English as either a primary or secondary language. Of those surveyed, 90.9% of respondents have not applied for Asylum; 98% were currently unemployed. The majority of respondents reported that they feel unsafe in their current housing or have no housing at all.

Since 2022, I have repeatedly advocated with the President, Majority Leader Schumer, Governor Hochul and Mayor Adams to provide TPS for our African Asylum Seekers, to fund food, housing and language programs, primarily administered by West African and African Mosques, to ensure that language and education services are offered in French and African Dialects and that religiously appropriate meals are provided.

In fact, in February, we brought hundreds of Asylum Seekers to Albany during Caucus Weekend to plead our case for more funding in the State Budget.

I am working tirelessly to drive those funds to our mosques and African service organizations to support food programs, ESL and other educational classes and capital upgrades that will provide shelter. I continue to seek money at all levels – City, State and through the Federal earmark process. I believe that today's hearing can only help our shared cause as we continue to fight for equity and fairness for Black Migrants in New York City.



PHARA SOUFFRANT FORREST
Assemblywoman 57th District
Brooklyn, NY

THE ASSEMBLY STATE
OF NEW YORK
ALBANY

CHAIR
Task Force on New Americans

COMMITTEES
Aging
Consumer Affairs and Protection
Higher Education
Health
Insurance
Social Services

Thursday, April 18, 2024

Re: Oversight Hearing on the Experiences of Black Migrants in New York City

Thank you to New York City Council Immigration Committee Chair Alexa Avilés and Hospitals Committee Chair Mercedes Narcisse for holding this week's hearing on the experiences of Black Migrants in New York City. Too often, the experiences of black immigrants are overlooked. As the daughter of black immigrant parents from Haiti and as the Chair of the New York State Assembly's Task Force on New Americans, I am so grateful to the chairs for creating a space for the black immigrant experience to be shared and discussed.

Recently, more than 10,000 migrants from Mauritania have immigrated to the US, with many of them arriving in New York City. They join large existing and arriving populations of migrants from other African countries including Senegal, Mali, Guinea, and Nigeria. Many of the migrants from Mauritania are escaping chattel slavery in their home country,¹ but they do not receive Temporary Protective Status in the US. Other African migrants are fleeing political instability, ethnic violence, and the impacts of climate change.

There is a large HERRC located just outside my district at 47 Hall Street in Clinton Hill which is home to many West African migrants, mainly single men. I had the opportunity to meet with several of the migrants living at this shelter, and what I heard made me very concerned about the experience of black immigrants specifically and the way the administration is handling the current migrant situation overall.

Members of my staff attempted to visit the Hall Street shelter along with other city and state elected officials and their staff and were denied access by the administration. This is unacceptable. The administration must work in partnership with local elected officials to understand and address the issues facing our immigrant community and ensure that local elected officials are afforded proper oversight of the conditions in facilities that affect their districts.

However, the reason for denying access to these facilities to elected officials is painfully clear: the conditions in the shelters are devastating and completely unacceptable. I have seen videos of leaking ceilings, dirty floors, and hundreds of human beings packed into one room. The shelters do not have sufficient bathrooms, showers, washing machines, or safe spaces for children.

Shelter residents told me that they are required to wait on line for hours to receive meals that consist of a piece of fruit and a pastry or granola bar. Sometimes they are given frozen meals that need to be reheated, but there are only two microwaves for 1000 residents. Discrimination and mistaken identity is also a poignant issue for many of the shelter residents; some of them told me that shelter staff mistook them for family members who had already eaten and denied them food.

¹ <https://hellgatenyc.com/mauritanian-asylum-seekers-nyc>

The city has contracted with nonprofit organizations to support recently arrived migrants, but many of them do not offer the languages that the migrants speak, creating a language barrier for many of them. It is my understanding that the nonprofit contracted to support the Hall Street HERRC is primarily equipped to serve Spanish-speaking migrants, meaning that those who speak French, Arabic, or any African languages such as Wolof or Fulani will struggle to access support. Additionally, even if language access were not an issue, it is my understanding that integration services that would assist new arrivals in achieving the stability and support they need to move out of these shelters and prosper are not being offered in sufficient amounts or at readily accessible locations. If we are to ever move toward a solution that benefits both new arrivals and New York State as a whole, we must remedy this.

Residents of the Hall Street shelter are also vulnerable to scams and confusion, especially when there is a lack of culturally and linguistically sensitive support systems. People have shown up to the shelter with a flyer offering jobs at 395 Pearl Street in downtown Brooklyn. When the migrants arrived at Pearl Street, they ended up getting blood drawn, without explicit consent or a clear understanding of why blood was being taken. They said they were not notified of the results of any tests that are run on the blood. Given our country's sordid history of medical experimentation on Black people, I ask that this practice be investigated and that testing not be conducted without explicit consent and provision of results.

The administration's 30- and 60-day eviction rules have had a major negative impact on all recent migrants, including those from African communities. The migrants I met with reported being woken in the middle of the night to be evicted from Hall Street. These eviction rules prevent adults from engaging in activities that will help integrate them into the community, whether that be attending English classes, or securing a job, and they prevent children from attending school. Recent reporting from New York Focus showed that immigrants from Senegal and Mauritania received the highest share of eviction notices in the city's shelter system.² The city must end the inhumane practice of 30- and 60-day evictions.

I believe that the city should take the following actions to improve the experiences of African migrants, particularly recent immigrants:

- End the 30- and 60-day eviction rules
- Hire speakers of French, Arabic, Wolof, Fulani, and other African languages to ensure cultural competency in service provision
- Collaborate with organizations, including nonprofits, churches, mosques, and cultural groups, that have experience serving African communities
- Contract with a competent nonprofit service provider to oversee conditions and procedures at the various shelters in New York City
- Advocate for the New York State legislature to pass bills A7994, A8088, and A1929, which will allow elected officials to visit shelter facilities, allow the Office of New Americans to provide services within shelters, and prohibit the imposition of limits on length of stay at shelters.

Sincerely,



Phara Souffrant Forrest
NYS Assemblywoman, 57th District

² <https://nysfocus.com/2024/02/15/eric-adams-migrants-shelter-mauritania-senegal>



New York City Council Hearing

Oversight:

**The Experiences of Black Migrants in New York City
Committee on Hospitals and Committee on Immigration**

**NYC Health + Hospitals
April 16, 2024**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony regarding the services provided by NYC Health + Hospitals (Health + Hospitals) to asylum seekers. It is the mission of Health + Hospitals to deliver high quality health services with compassion, dignity, and respect to all, without exception. Healthcare is a human right, and Health + Hospitals is proud to honor this right for asylum seekers every day, starting at our City's Arrival Center.

Too often, we have seen the consequences of healthcare being denied or not offered to asylum seekers prior to coming to NYC. Common health needs among asylum seekers include obstetric care, primary care for children, and dental care. It is a regular occurrence that we see pregnant people that have never seen a doctor before, and we have even helped a woman who was in active labor as she got off a chartered bus from Texas. We see men on the last day of their HIV medications, and children deprived of their medications at the border. When children arrive in NYC, they are too often malnourished and scared. We start with making the critical connection to healthcare.

In response, we have created a coordinated medical approach in NYC, to help those in need and who deserve medical care. Our system starts at the Arrival Center, where all asylum seekers go through four medical stations. First, we screen for communicable diseases include active tuberculosis, COVID-19, and varicella (chickenpox). Second, we offer urgent care, which too often has been the first time pregnant people have been offered the opportunity to see a clinician. Third, we screen for depression, and for those in need, we have social workers on site for immediate care. Fourth, we offer lifesaving vaccines to children and adults, including creating walk in capacity for children to get vaccines at several of our sites. We have administered over 60,000 vaccines at our Arrival Center and humanitarian centers.

After new arrivals have had their urgent healthcare needs addressed, they meet with our case workers to make plans to complete their journeys or get placed into temporary shelter. Since the Arrival Center first opened its doors, we have provided this care to over 130,000 individuals. Once asylum seekers have received care at the Arrival Center, we offer continued care within the Health + Hospitals system. Over 600 people have safely given birth to healthy babies in our system and over 16,000 people have applied for health insurance to develop life-changing healthcare relationships with their new primary care doctors.

It is a privilege to be able to offer lifesaving medical care to asylum seekers, who have great need. However, treating healthcare as a human right should start at the border, where asylum seekers should be able to access basic care like prenatal services and vaccinations. There should also be federal support for the upfront and immediate healthcare services we provide at the Arrival Center, including crucial screenings for communicable disease to prevent outbreaks. Finally, asylum seekers will have ongoing healthcare needs. Moving forward, we must continue to plan ahead for key areas of high demand, such as obstetric and primary care to succeed in offering ongoing care to asylum seekers staying in NYC.

Health + Hospitals is immensely proud of the work that we do to support asylum seekers in New York City, and grateful to the Council for their support of this critical work. Thank you to the committees or the opportunity to provide testimony and for your continued support of Health + Hospitals. I look forward to our continued partnership.



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness
for Women and their Children

Testimony for Women in Need (Win) for the City Council Committee on Immigration April 16th, 2024

Background on Win and Black Migrant Families

Thank you to Chair Avilés and to the esteemed members of the Committee on Immigration for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Henry Love, and I am the Vice President of Public Policy and Strategy at Win, the largest provider of shelter and services to families with children experiencing homelessness in New York City. We operate 16 shelters, including a designated migrant shelter, and nearly 500 supportive housing units across the five boroughs. Each night, more than 6,500 people call Win “home,” including around 300 migrant families. I am here today to speak to the experiences of the black migrant families that Win shelters and to recommend straightforward policy solutions to improve the opportunities available to this group of asylum seekers.

Twenty percent of our asylum-seeking families are Hondurans, most of whom belong to the indigenous Garifuna population. Many of our Garifuna families have fled widescale racism and persecution on the basis of their ethnicity and blackness. In Honduras, our Garifuna clients experienced systemic disenfranchisement and land dispossession by the government on account of their race. Upon coming to New York City, they have found safe shelter at Win but are still sometimes subject to discrimination. Recently, one Win mother was the subject of xenophobic physical and verbal abuse from a NYC Health + Hospitals nurse. We are investigating this incident, but we know that this sort of event is not an anomaly.

Win also shelters African families coming from Guinea, the Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal. Both these African families and Garifuna families often face unique language barriers while navigating city systems. At the Asylum Application Help Center, after waiting over a week for an appointment, families come away with documents that are in English and illegible to them. Often, families are just given the federal I-589 Application for Asylum and for Withholding of Removal form in English and are told to come back with it filled out. Legal services are critical to any path to permanent housing, but this is an impossible task for a non-English speaker unfamiliar with the federal immigration system.

In response, Win has had to mount our own Legal Empowerment for Asylum-seeking and Displaced families (L.E.A.D) Program with the legal non-profit New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) to provide high quality and free legal assistance with asylum claims. Our program has been extremely successful for the 1,000 asylum seekers that Win shelters, but we know that not all migrants have access to these services. As such, we need to expand services like these and push forward proven policies to responsibly accommodate Black migrants in New York City. This is not only a housing justice issue but a racial justice issue, and as a city of immigrants we must adopt solutions that will help new arrivals and, in doing so, help all of New York become culturally and economically stronger.



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness
for Women and their Children

Introduced Legislation and Win's Homelessness and Immigration Recommendations

We applaud the City's introduction of legislation to increase transparency around their management of migrants, like Intro 84 and Intro 85 to elicit information related to economic opportunities and health needs of asylum seekers. Additionally, Intro 739 to receive reports on expenses, temporary housing, asylum applications, and the demographics of arriving migrants will yield valuable data. Finally, we add our support to Res 340 to call on Congress and USCIS to cover the cost of filing humanitarian benefit applications.

However, we anticipate that these reports will confirm what we already know. The City's approach heretofore has been expensive, ad hoc, and harmful for the health of migrants and the city at large. We cannot afford to wait any longer to implement real actions that will improve conditions for black migrants. We urge the Council to also consider the attached report that includes recommendations to improve the health of migrants and our city's budget.

This new report released today from Win shows that policy changes including ending the 30- and 60-day rules, upholding the right to shelter, expanding housing vouchers, and increasing access to employment authorization would save up to 3.5 billion dollars. The current response to the influx of asylum seekers is unsustainably expensive, and sheltering migrants can cost nearly \$400 a night. Our proposals—like implementing the CityFHEPS bill package and allowing migrants to utilize CityFHEPS—would directly impact migrants by giving them permanent housing alternatives and, at the same time, would save the city billions of dollars. It has been over two years since this wave of immigration began, and all New Yorkers deserve solutions to this situation that will improve outcomes, opportunities, and the budget.



To: New York City Council Committee on Immigration
From: Ellinor Rutkey, Esq., The Door's Legal Services Center
Re: Oversight Hearing: The Experiences of Black Migrants in New York City
Date: April 16, 2024

The Door is a comprehensive youth development organization that has been supporting vulnerable youth in New York City since 1972. Each year, we provide services to nearly 9,000 young people between the ages of 12 and 24, many of them immigrants. The services we provide include healthcare, education, supportive housing, food and nutrition, career development, arts and recreation, mental health counseling, and legal assistance — all under one roof. We are also a Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) drop-in center, providing food, clothing, showers, laundry, and case management services to young people who are unhoused or unstably housed. At The Door, we emphasize empowering and engaging the young people we serve, and we are committed to creating a safe, equitable, and inclusive space for young people and staff.

The Legal Services Center at The Door is an office of over 50 individuals, including attorneys, social workers, and support staff. We specialize in serving vulnerable children and young people, including many clients who are unhoused, undocumented, and/or LGBTQIA+. Our attorneys represent youth in removal proceedings before immigration courts, as well as those seeking to regularize their status through the filing of affirmative humanitarian applications. In the fiscal year 2023, we handled 3,282 immigration matters for young people. We also operate several free legal clinics, including a weekly drop-in legal clinic for runaway/homeless youth.

Since the beginning of 2024, the overwhelming majority of young people seeking services for the first time at The Door are Black new New Yorkers. These young people tend to be from West Africa and speak a variety of languages, including Wolof, Fulani, Pulaar, French, and Arabic. Many of these young people are practicing Muslims and/or come from Muslim families. Practically all of the Black new New Yorkers we meet at The Door are unhoused or housing unstable. It is necessary for the City to recognize these intersectional aspects of the identities of newly arrived Black immigrants in order to meet the particular needs of this group.

I. Black New New Yorkers Lack Access to Proper Housing and Shelter

i. Insufficient Capacity Within the DYCD Youth Shelter System

Unhoused New Yorkers ages 16 through 24 – including the very many unhoused Black new New Yorkers we serve at The Door – rely on the DYCD youth shelter system for housing and other vital services. As the RHY population has increased over the last two years, demand for youth shelters has skyrocketed. However, there is a significant dearth of shelter beds within the DYCD system.¹

¹ See, e.g., Gwynne Hogan, *Youth Shelter System Locks Out Hundreds as Migrants Seek Entry*, The City (Mar. 12, 2024, 5:00 AM), https://www.thecity.nyc/2024/03/12/youth-shelter-system-locks-out-young-migrants/?oref=nyn_firstread_nl.



Subsequently, very few of the unhoused Black new New Yorkers that we serve at The Door have found placement in a youth shelter. Many of these young people have tried repeatedly to find a bed without any success, constantly visiting and calling shelters in hopes that one will have a vacancy. DYCD providers are so overwhelmed with the demand for shelter that eligible young people are not even being added to a waiting list for a bed – they are simply being turned away. As a result, no amount of patience or time will result in a young person receiving a youth shelter placement.

Given the simultaneous unprecedented demand for youth shelter beds and the extreme shortage of those beds, an alarming number of unhoused Black new New Yorkers between the ages of 18 and 24 are being placed in Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Centers (HERRCs) instead of youth shelters. These young people are eligible for placement in both the DYCD youth shelter system and the HERRC system because of their age. Although youth placed in HERRCs are legal adults, the fact that they are being placed in a HERRC rather than in a youth shelter is cause for serious concern.

ii. Young Black New New Yorkers Placed in HERRCs

First, young people being placed in HERRCs are in extremely vulnerable positions. Many of them have only just arrived in the United States after a perilous, long, and often traumatic journey from their countries of origin. Even before setting out on that journey, many of these young people have already experienced significant trauma in their lives.

For example, at a recent drop-in legal clinic for runaway/homeless youth, Door staff members spoke with a Black 20-year-old who was unable to find a bed in a youth shelter. He had come to the United States after traveling by plane, bus, and by foot from his home country in North Africa. The young person had made the difficult decision to leave his home country after rebel forces broke into his family's home, raped his sister, and beat his brother to death before his eyes.

Other young people we meet have experienced significant trauma due to familial abuse, neglect, or abandonment. For example, at the same drop-in clinic for runaway homeless youth, Door staff members also spoke with a Black 18-year-old who is currently living in a HERRC. He had made a similarly arduous journey to the United States from his home country in West Africa. This young person decided to leave his home country after years of being hit, whipped, and physically abused by his father. He hopes to attend school in New York – something he had been unable to do in his home country, as his father forced him to work on a farm rather than attend school starting at age 10.

This history of trauma is not the only reason why the Black young people being placed in HERRCs are so vulnerable. These young people are also vulnerable because they have essentially no support – in any form – here in New York. For one, many young immigrants do not know any Americans when they arrive in the United States. When Door staff members ask Black new New Yorkers about trusted adults that they can turn to for support in New York, they almost always tell us that there is no such person in their lives. These young people are thus forced to navigate a new country and culture by themselves and to be their own advocate in the



face of barriers. This – coupled with the fact that many of these young people also do not speak English proficiently, and that many have significant gaps in their formal education – makes it exceedingly difficult for young people to access the supports they need if they are placed in a HERRC. Moreover, these young people have essentially no money, and thus, no way to purchase necessary goods and services. And because the young people placed in HERRCs all recently arrived in the United States, most will not be eligible to obtain employment authorization for at least several months – and likely, much longer.

iii. HERRCs Are Inappropriate Environments for Young People

HERRCs are not appropriate environments for these vulnerable young people. While DYCD youth shelters are supportive and welcoming environments for young adults, HERRCs are inhospitable, alienating, and chaotic. With thousands of people staying in makeshift tent cities, HERRCs offer little to no privacy for their occupants. This lack of privacy can be especially difficult for young people who need solitude and isolation to process complex trauma. HERRCs also are open to people of all ages, meaning that young people in HERRCs often find themselves among much older adults rather than fellow teenagers and young adults. As a result, many young people say that they have not formed any sort of relationship with their fellow HERRC residents and lack a sense of safety and belonging.

An additional reason why HERRCs are not appropriate environments for vulnerable young people is that HERRCs do not supply sufficient food to their occupants. Young people consistently report to Door staff members that they are given barely any food at their HERRCs. While food is a necessity for all people living in shelter, consistent access to nutritious and plentiful food is particularly important for young people whose essential organs, including their brains, are still developing.

Further, HERRCs deprive young people of the opportunity to find safety and stability in New York. For the last few months, Black youth living in HERRCs have been subject to the unlawful and inhumane 30- and 60-day shelter rules.² As a result of these rules and actions, every 30 to 60 days, the young person must uproot their life and find somewhere new to live – without the

² On March 15, 2024, the Legal Aid Society announced that it had reached a settlement with the City that would impact the length of time that new New Yorkers are able to remain in shelter. Under the settlement agreement, young people under the age of 23 will be forced to leave their shelter after 60 days rather than 30 days. See Mia Hollie & Annie McDonough, *City Hall and Legal Aid Society Settle Right to Shelter Case*, City & State New York (Mar. 15, 2024), <https://www.cityandstateny.com/policy/2024/03/city-hall-and-legal-aid-society-settle-right-shelter-case/394996/>. While 60-day placements are certainly preferable to 30-day placements, this settlement does not prevent vulnerable young people from being forced to leave their shelter placements. An additional change under the settlement is that HERRC residents may request to remain in their shelter placement at the end of their 30- or 60-day stay, rather than be forced to leave. Stip., ¶ 24, *Callahan v. Carey*, No. 42582/1979 (NY Sup Ct New York Cnty 2024),

https://iapps.courts.state.ny.us/nyscef/ViewDocument?docIndex=mMvltZfjq_PLUS_X/RU7jGZrf4Q==.

However, these requests will only be granted in the event of “extenuating circumstances,” and the person making the request has an obligation to “take all appropriate affirmative steps to resettle in housing opportunities outside of City Shelters.” *Id.* at ¶¶ 22, 24, App’x A. Particularly for young people who lack a support system and a strong grasp of English, these requirements may prove too burdensome. As a result, vulnerable young people may be disproportionately unlikely to be permitted to remain in shelter at the end of their 30- or 60-day placement. Moreover, it is unclear exactly how these new policies will be implemented.



support of a trusted adult, without money, and usually, without proficiency in English. Moreover, some young people report being given only a few days' notice that they will need to leave their HERRC, which has caused these young people great fear and panic.

These constant evictions, and the threat thereof, make it all but impossible for Black young people to develop a sense of stability in New York. Young people living in HERRCs report that it is hard for them to make friends and form support networks. It is also hard for these young people to take advantage of community-based resources, like mutual aid groups that distribute food and clothes. By the time that a young HERRC resident learns about a resource in their community, they will only be able to make use of it for at most a few weeks before they are forced to leave that community. Moreover, the threat of constant evictions under the 30- and 60-day shelter rules makes it very difficult for young people to stay in school, which is particularly worrisome when so many of these young people have already experienced interruptions in their formal education.

Unsurprisingly, this indefensible policy has also resulted in many young people sleeping on the streets or otherwise entering dangerous living situations. At The Door, staff members regularly speak with Black young people who have been removed from their existing HERRC placement and have not been able to find anywhere else to stay. These young people are often forced to develop their own strategies for keeping themselves safe, such as gathering with other newly arrived immigrants and sleeping in shifts. Other young people succeed in finding a place to stay, but at the cost of their own safety. For example, when one newly arrived Black youth was unable to find a shelter placement, he moved into an apartment with several adults. These adults have coerced this young person into performing unpaid domestic labor, trapping him in an abusive setting. It goes without saying that the living situations that young people face after being removed from a HERRC are extremely dangerous and completely unacceptable as a matter of policy.

If these young people had instead received a bed in a DYCD youth shelter, they would not be subject to the City's cruel 30- and 60-day rules. Rather, following their shelter stay, they would be supported in transitioning to a Transitional Independent Living (TIL) program for up to two years. Thus, for a young person, placement in a HERRC means a cycle of constant threats of eviction, whereas placement in a DYCD youth shelter means long-term services and support.

More broadly, the services offered to young people in HERRCs pale in comparison to those offered to young people in DYCD youth shelters. While young people in HERRCs receive meagre meals and a cot on which to sleep, young people in DYCD youth shelters receive numerous supportive services tailored to their needs. For example, youth living in a youth shelter have access to mental health care, career and education support, medical care, and case management services. They also have access to a plethora of daily activities, ranging from art classes to pickup sports games. In this way, young people in youth shelters are equipped with the tools that they need to thrive, whereas young people in HERRCs are provided with barely



enough to survive.³ It is absolutely necessary that the City provide more youth shelter beds to house and support newly arrived Black young people.

II. Black New New Yorkers Lack Access to Immigration Legal Services

i. Legal Services Providers Are at Capacity

Legal services providers in New York City have never been able to fully meet the demand for free immigration legal help. Though the need for these services is great, there has always been a shortage of free immigration lawyers in the City. Over the last two years, non-profit immigration legal service providers have only become more strained, as the number of individuals seeking these services has skyrocketed and organizations are still dealing with many older cases delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic court closures. Every day at the Door, staff members turn away young Black immigrants seeking legal support and representation. In the month of March 2024, we received over 50 requests for immigration legal help, and we are on track to receive even more requests in April. Our partners representing youth and adult immigrants in New York face this same challenge – we are nearly all at capacity.

In February 2023, The Door’s Legal Services Center formally closed immigration intake to focus on its heavy case load and a waitlist of roughly 400 young immigrants in need of legal assistance. After spending the summer working with our pro bono partners to reach all the young people on our waitlist, we reopened intake at the end of 2023. In the few short months that our intake has been open, we have already added 85 young people eligible for immigration relief to our waitlist and have turned countless more away. Over 100 are still waiting for an initial legal screening appointment.

Moreover, our weekly drop-in legal clinic for runaway/homeless youth has been busier than ever. In the past, the clinic saw zero to one person each week. Now, clinic staffers routinely speak with up to a dozen people over the course of an hour, nearly all of whom are Black new immigrants looking for immigration legal services. The need and demand for services grows every week and we do not have enough capacity to keep up.

ii. The Importance of Free Legal Services for Young Immigrants

Now more than ever, it is vital that young Black immigrants receive free and competent legal services. Door staff members have noticed that immigration hearings are being scheduled particularly quickly, leaving young people with even less time than usual to find a lawyer. Given these time constraints, and the overall shortage of free immigration lawyers, many young Black immigrants have been entirely unable to find legal assistance.

Even many of the young people who have managed to meet with a lawyer have been disadvantaged due to the shortage of free legal service providers. For example, Door staff members have spoken with Black young people who turned 21 years old several months after

³ See, e.g., Giulia McDonnell Nieto Del Rio, *NYC Shelter Evictions Keep Migrant Youth From Vital Resources*, Documented (Feb. 16, 2024), <https://documentedny.com/2024/02/16/shelter-evictions-nyc-migrants-minors/>.



arriving in the United States. If those young people had found a lawyer immediately upon arriving in the country and before turning 21, some could have successfully petitioned for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) – a pathway to legal status that requires that the applicant be under 21 years old. In this way, long waiting times can result in a young person missing their opportunity to apply for certain forms of relief.

Further, a great proportion of those young people have strong legal cases. Many of the young people that The Door turns away should ultimately be found eligible for legal relief, including SIJS and asylum. Without a lawyer, though, it can be difficult – or even impossible – for a young person to successfully self-petition for relief.

The risks to a young person who is not able to find a lawyer are significant. First, the majority of the Black youth who have requested legal help at The Door are in removal proceedings, meaning that they risk being removed to the very country that they fled to get here. As discussed, these young people are often fleeing horrific situations, and for many, being returned to their home country could be deadly.

While there are resources available to young immigrants who are unable to find lawyers, these are insufficient. For example, resources like the Red Cross Asylum Application Help Center are not equipped to provide young people with the level of support they need to navigate their immigration cases. Although these resources can help young people to submit immigration applications, they cannot provide support to young immigrants before or after the application is filed. And particularly for young people involved in immigration court, legal support that falls short of full representation is simply not adequate – especially when these young people are at risk of being removed from the United States. Young Black immigrants need comprehensive legal services, and it is necessary for the City to provide funding to hire more immigration lawyers.

III. Black New New Yorkers Lack Access to Services in Their Preferred Languages

The language access needs of Black new New Yorkers are not currently being met. The newly arrived Black immigrants that we see at The Door speak a variety of languages with varying levels of fluency. Most Black new New Yorkers at The Door speak Wolof, Fulani, Pulaar, or Arabic dialects as their first language. While many of these young people also speak French, only some report that French is their preferred language. Some Black youth do not speak any English or French and require services to be provided in a different language. This is particularly true for young people who have little to no formal education, which would typically be conducted in English or French in many West African countries.

The great need for improved language access presents itself even before immigrants reach New York. Notably, the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) One mobile app – the tool that immigrants now must use to register for an appointment to cross the border and begin the process



of claiming asylum – is only available in three languages: English, Spanish, and Haitian Creole.⁴ Thus, the majority of Black immigrants will not be able to use the app in a language that is familiar to them, let alone in their preferred language. The consequences of this failure to provide adequate language access are tremendous: in many cases, an immigrant who does not make an appointment using the CBP One app before crossing the border will be rendered ineligible for asylum under the Biden Administration’s asylum ban, even if they meet all other eligibility criteria.⁵ Without asylum eligibility, the probable result is that many of these Black immigrants will be ordered removed to a country where their wellbeing – and sometimes, lives – will be at risk.

Once an immigrant manages to enter the United States, the availability of services continues to depend on the individual’s proficiency in English. For French-speaking young people, there are some services available. However, French-speaking youth do not have access to the same quantity and quality of services as their English-speaking peers. For example, at The Door, we have far more staff members who speak English and Spanish than we do those who speak French. This makes it more difficult for us to provide timely services to the many French-speaking newly arrived Black immigrants because there are fewer staff members capable of providing those services. And while we offer a plethora of activities for youth at The Door, only a handful of those activities are offered in French.

It is even more difficult for young people who do not speak English or French to access services. At The Door, we have no staff members who speak Wolof, Fulani, or Pulaar, and we do not have staff members who speak every Arabic dialect. We offer no activities in Wolof, Fulani, Pulaar, or any Arabic dialect. When we speak with young people whose preferred language is an African language or certain Arabic dialects, we rely on telephonic interpretation services like Certified Languages International. The wait times for African language and Arabic dialect interpreters are often very long, and sometimes, no interpreter is available. As a result, we are not able to provide the same quality of services to the many Black young people who speak these languages.

These deficiencies are particularly concerning in the context of emergency and legal services. At The Door, staff members regularly speak with Black youth who have received legal or other important notices only in English and who do not understand the information they are being told. Young people also have a harder time accessing emergency services if information is only provided in English. For example, much of the information about access to shelter is not easily accessible in languages like Wolof, Fulani, Pulaar, certain Arabic dialects, and even French. Further, Door staff members have also been made aware of multiple instances in which non-English speaking young people were provided with only cursory pre-written information about access to necessities like food and shelter, while English-speaking young people received ongoing support from service providers to ensure that they had sustained access to food and

⁴ Leila Lorenzo et. al., *CBP One’s Obscene Language Errors Create More Barriers for Asylum Seekers*, Respond: Crisis Translation (Apr. 1, 2024), <https://respondercrisistranslation.org/en/news/cbp-ones-obscene-language-errors-create-more-barriers-for-asylum-seekers>.

⁵ Ayelet Parness, *For Asylum Seekers, CBP One App Poses Major Challenges*, HIAS (Nov. 8, 2023), <https://hias.org/news/asylum-seekers-cbp-one-app-poses-major-challenges/>.



shelter. It is crucial that the City take steps to eliminate this gap and provide the Black immigrants with full access to services regardless of the language(s) they speak.

IV. Black, Muslim New New Yorkers Experience Barriers to Practicing Their Religion

The City has not adequately responded to the religious needs of newly arrived Black immigrants. The majority of the Black new New Yorkers that we meet at The Door practice Islam and come from Muslim households. Therefore, the City must ensure that service providers are equipped to provide culturally competent services and that there are sufficient resources devoted to ensuring that these young people are able to practice their religion. For example, staff members at The Door have repurposed a private room within the building as a prayer room and have purchased prayer mats to be used by Muslim youth. Still, Muslim youth lack a full-time dedicated prayer space at The Door, and Muslim youth generally report insufficient access to dedicated prayer spaces throughout the City.

The fact that many newly arrived Black immigrants face barriers to practicing religion was particularly apparent during Ramadan. Muslim youth frequently reported that they found it very difficult to obtain enough food during their iftar (the fast-breaking meal at sundown) or during non-fasting hours. This was particularly true for young people living in HERRCs, where very many Black new New Yorkers live. Muslim young people living in HERRCs reported that they were provided only with a standard small meal at iftar, which was plainly insufficient after having fasted during daylight hours. As a result, the many Black immigrants who practice Islam found it more difficult to practice their religion. Moreover, this lack of access to sufficient food also jeopardized the physical safety and wellbeing of Muslim immigrants. The City must be attentive to the cultural needs of newly arrived Black youth and must ensure that Black immigrants are fully supported in practicing their religion.

V. Black New New Yorkers Experience Anti-Black Racism

It is well-understood that Black people in the United States experience systemic and institutional racism, and newly arrived Black immigrants are no exception. For one, Black new New Yorkers are particularly vulnerable to policing and its harms. Black youth are the most likely demographic to be stopped by police,⁶ and unhoused people have been increasingly targeted by law enforcement under the Adams Administration.⁷ Further, because many newly arrived Black youth do not speak English fluently, they are likely to experience confusion and fear during an English-language police interaction. Of course, the consequences of a police interaction for Black youth without legal status can also be extremely serious, potentially even leading to the removal of a young person from the United States.

These concerns are not just hypothetical. Over the last several weeks, The Door has seen a marked increase in the number of newly arrived Black immigrants who have attended the RHY

⁶ *A Closer Look at Stop and Frisk in NYC*, N.Y. Civil Liberties Union (last accessed Apr. 12, 2024), <https://www.nyclu.org/en/closer-look-stop-and-frisk-nyc>.

⁷ See, e.g., David Brand, *Inside NYC's Street Homeless Sweeps, Rapid Responses and Signs of Futility*, CityLimits (Apr. 11, 2022), <https://citylimits.org/2022/04/11/inside-nycs-street-homeless-sweeps-rapid-responses-and-signs-of-futility/>.



Clinic for criminal law help. Each of these young people had had an encounter with the police and/or received a ticket. Although receiving a ticket is preferable to being charged with or arrested for a crime or misdemeanor, the young people with whom we work have no money to pay any fines, resulting in a default judgment that could negatively impact the young person for years to come.

Anti-Black racism also presents a barrier for Black youth in accessing age-limited services. Door staff members have been made aware of multiple instances in which Black young people were heavily scrutinized when attempting to access services reserved for youth. For example, some Black young people were told that they looked too old or were accused of lying about their age, or fraudulently using a younger person's identification. Non-Black young people have not reported being questioned about their age. These experiences can undermine the trust that young people have in service providers and can cause young people to feel uncomfortable in attempting to access services. Even worse, some Black youth may be turned away from accessing services that they are qualified to access, solely because of the nefarious impacts of anti-Black racism. There is an urgent need for the City to ensure that Black youth have the ability to access services without being harmed by racism and discrimination.

Moreover, exposure to anti-Black racism does not start only at the point when a young person is attempting to settle in the United States; Black youth regularly encounter anti-Black racism and racist policies at the United States border. For example, the CBP One app relies on a flawed facial recognition tool that fails to recognize Black faces for required authentication.⁸ As a result, many Black immigrants are prevented from using the app and from making an appointment to cross the border.⁹ Further, and crucially, these immigrants are thereby generally prevented from retaining asylum eligibility under the terms of the Biden Administration's asylum ban. This will inevitably lead to a disproportionate number of otherwise asylum-eligible Black immigrants being ordered removed from the United States.

VI. Conclusion

The City has a responsibility to newly arrived Black youth to ensure that they have full access to the services and supports that they need to thrive as New Yorkers.

The City must recognize that the majority of Black new New Yorkers are unhoused, and that far too many young people have been unable to access the safety, stability, and services offered in youth shelters. Thus, I urge New York City to fund additional DYCD youth shelter beds.

The City must recognize that the majority of Black new New Yorkers need free immigration legal services, without which many of these young people will be ordered removed to a country where their wellbeing – and sometimes, lives – will be at risk. Therefore, I urge New York City to fund youth-specific, no-cost immigration legal services.

⁸ Melissa del Bosque, *Facial Recognition Bias Frustrates Black Asylum Applicants to US, Advocates Say*, The Guardian (Feb. 8, 2023), <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/feb/08/us-immigration-cbp-one-app-facial-recognition-bias>.

⁹ *Id.*



The City must recognize that many Black new New Yorkers are not fluent in English, and while many of these individuals speak French, many others do not. Thus, I urge New York City to expand services and support for speakers of languages including Wolof, Fulani, Pulaar, and African dialects of Arabic.

The City must recognize that many Black new New Yorkers are practicing Muslims and/or come from Muslim households. Therefore, I urge New York City to expand culturally relevant services and supports for these youth, particularly those living within the City's shelter systems.

Finally, the City must recognize that Black new New Yorkers are harmed by anti-Black racism. Thus, I urge New York City to take an active role in combatting systemic and institutional racism among service providers and within our city.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ellinor Rutkey', written over a horizontal line.

Ellinor Rutkey, Esq.

Legal Fellow

The Door's Legal Services Center

New York City Council Committees on Immigration and Hospitals
Thursday April 16, 2024; 10:00am
Hearing on Oversight-The Experiences of Black Migrants in NYC
Testimony of [Melissa Johnson] [NY Organizer] [Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI)]

Thank you to the Committee on Immigration and the Committee on Hospitals (“the Committees”) for holding this public hearing to address the experiences of Black migrants in NYC. My name is **[Melissa Johnson, NY Organizer for the Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI)]**.

I am testifying on behalf of BAJI to speak to the expansion of policing, private security, and surveillance and its impact on newly arrived Black asylum seekers within the asylum shelter system through the use of NYPD and the subcontracting of private companies, including but not limited to, DocGo, Arrow Security, MedRite and BHRAGS Home Corp. who are primarily providing private security and surveillance and are not equipped to provide culturally competent, trauma-informed care, case management and community navigation support all needed for the inclusion of asylum seekers into our communities and their stable transition into full and autonomous livelihoods whether here in NY or outside of the state.

Over the course of the last year, through the guidance of Afrikana, Africa is Everywhere, and African Communities Together (ACT), our mutual aid work has been to support the Stockton Respite Center located in District 36 in Bed-Stuy, Brooklyn and the Hall Street Shelter located in District 35, Clinton Hill, Brooklyn. Today, we will speak to what we witnessed there.

The use of NYPD and private companies, does not support the vulnerability of Black asylum seekers, especially those who are African, Haitian, or Black LGBTQ+ migrants who arrive fleeing war, conflict, political violence or threat of life due to a combination of factors including (race, ethnicity, religious or political belief or gender identity and sexual orientation). In the absence of culturally competent, trauma-informed care, Black asylum seekers, including women and children, are subject to increased racial targeting, harassment and discriminatory practices which makes them vulnerable to arrest, incarceration, and immigrant detention, negatively affecting or subsequently ending their process to seek asylum through immigration court proceedings.

Police, private security, and surveillance in these shelters cannot and do not provide culturally competent, trauma-informed care, such as:

- **Health and Mental health services**, including
 - Medical Prescription Support
 - Reproductive and Sexual Healthcare Support

- appropriate Dietary food and essential Hygiene materials
- and consistent, accessible and functioning Restroom/Shower, AC, Wifi and Laundry Facilities
- **Case Management**, including:
 - **Afro-Indigenous language translation/interpretation for (Afro-Portuguese, Haitian Creole, Pulaar and Wolof)** in conjunction with
 - appropriate ESL and Child and Adult Education classes
 - Legal Representation and
 - OSHA/Workforce training as well as
- **Community Navigation support** for
 - ***Social Service resources providing***
 - Municipal City-ID Cards (NYC-ID)
 - Health Insurance
 - and **Vouchers for Housing, SNAP, WIC and MTA fair-fares programs**

However, through subcontracts police enforcement and surveillance, what we have seen, documented by Black migrant organizations, mutual aid groups and Legal Aid, is that both police and private security have participated in physically violent, xenophobic, retaliatory and extreme anti-Black practices that abuse and discriminate against Black asylum seekers, mirroring conditions found already within the NYC Shelter system and within our state carceral system. Consequently, the deployment of increased policing and the absence of culturally competent, trauma-informed care through direct-service providers, reinforces detention-like conditions that undoubtedly harms already vulnerable Black asylum seekers. These practices reflect intentional abandonment, anti-Black policy-making and violate the right to a system of care for all people in New York.

BAJI has witnessed the Adams' Administration create an inhumane asylum shelter system. Therefore, City Council must act to strengthen shelter and respite center stay policies but must remove contracts for NYPD and private companies that police and surveille and do not provide culturally competent, trauma-informed care to prevent further severe violations of human rights. Currently Bill [Int 0739](#) and it's particular focus on the reporting of asylum seeker demographics and also active contracts helps provide increased transparency and accountability to address abuses and discrimination experienced by Black asylum seekers related to subcontractor services, particularly those enforced by NYPD and private companies. This bill can help rectify some of the shortcomings in the City's existing asylum shelter laws and constitute a step towards welcoming people with care.

Title: Bridging Communities Through Accessible English Education

Dear Honorary Council Members,

My name is Paola Puente. I am writing to express my gratitude on behalf of the Adult Learning Center. Thank you for allowing us to share the impact of the ALC (Adult Learning Center) program on our community. With your support, we also want to advocate for its expansion.

The ALC program has been instrumental in providing free English classes, Digital Literacy, CNA, and HSE (High School Equivalency) to members of our community who may need access to such resources. As a partnership coordinator in the program, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges new immigrants face when navigating life in a new country. Language barriers often stand as formidable obstacles, hindering their access to education and opportunities for a better life. However, I am proud that our community is taking strides to address this issue head-on. By providing free English classes, we break down linguistic barriers and open doors to education, employment, and integration.

However, the demand for these classes far exceeds our current ability. With over 300 individuals on our waiting list, there is a pressing need for additional funding to expand the reach of the ALC program and accommodate all those eager to learn. Just a couple of decades ago, resources like these were scarce, and many newcomers needed help finding the support they needed. But now, with the availability of free English classes, we have the chance to change the narrative and empower new immigrants to build brighter futures for themselves and their families.

If our proposal for increased funding and support is approved, we will invest in language education and our community's social and economic well-being. Access to English language skills opens doors to employment opportunities, higher education, and active participation in civic life.

Please consider the ALC program's immense impact; with your assistance, we could continue to have it. Together, we can make English education more accessible and empower individuals to thrive in our diverse society. We have the power to make a difference in the lives of new immigrants. Investing in education and embracing diversity can create a stronger, more inclusive community for generations to come. Let us seize this opportunity to positively impact and help everyone realize their full potential.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I look forward to your support in making our vision of inclusive education a reality.

Sincerely,

Paola Puente



INSTITUTE FOR
LITERACY STUDIES

Speech & Theatre Building, Room 117
250 Bedford Park Blvd West
Bronx, NY 10468

Phone: 718-960-6089
Fax: 718-960-8054
www.lehman.edu

Tricia Mullen, Director
Lehman College Adult Learning Center
patricia.mullen@lehman.cuny.edu (718) 960-2460

Originally sent via email: February 20, 2024

Dear Honorary Council Member Stevens and Budget Director Ventura:

My name is Tricia Mullen. I am the Director of the Adult Learning Center (ALC) at Lehman College. Our Partnership Coordinator, Paula Puente, and two members of our Educational Advisory Team, Bibi Rabeha and Yndiana Alba, and I are asking for advice on securing funding to offer additional free adult ESOL Language and ESOL Digital Literacy classes because our current waiting list has more than 200 students whose language levels were assessed, and their class placement has been determined already. This does not include those on our waiting list who have not been tested yet. We have not advertised our ESOL Digital Literacy classes this year because we have limited funding for them.

Rather than seeking classes elsewhere, adults who remain on our lists report that their friends and families have advised them that our programs are worth it. While that may be flattering, we recognize that our community cannot wait. We included both research and our findings in our proposals that document the roots of this disparity and the negative impact on our community if they continue to wait. Frankly, it is unacceptable.

Earlier this week, I emailed the proposals submitted using the new F25 CUNY form requesting \$115,490 to support nine (9) free Basic to Advanced ESOL Language classes and \$128,337 for nine (9) free ESOL Digital Literacy classes, leading to Microsoft Office certifications to your office.

I do not intend to overwhelm your staff with email but to make your work easier if possible. I am following up seeking advice from you as Chair of the Children and Youth Committee, Co-Chair of the Bronx Delegation, and a member of the Black, Latino, and Asian Caucus as well as the Committee on Finance.

Does your Committee on Children and Youth consider the discretionary applications for the Adult Literacy Initiative, for which we submitted one proposal, specifically for additional ESOL classes? Is this a separate category from the new DYCD's RFP? Please let us know how to proceed if not.

We submitted our second proposal for ESOL Digital Literacy classes to the Digital Inclusion and Literacy Initiative, but I cannot determine what committee reviews them.

If these initiatives do not fund our proposals, we are seeking funding from the Bronx Council Members whose constituents attend our classes. I analyzed our participants' addresses and have percentages prepared if the Bronx members seek them to determine how much they would like to contribute to the total.

We would appreciate your response to our questions. We look forward to discussing our proposals with you.

In addition, I will contact all the members of the Bronx Delegation, including the Bronx Council Members whose constituents attend our classes, too.

Sincerely,

Tricia Mullen



INSTITUTE FOR
LITERACY STUDIES

Speech & Theatre Building, Room 117
250 Bedford Park Blvd West
Bronx, NY 10468

Phone: 718-960-6089
Fax: 718-960-8054
www.lehman.edu

Tricia Mullen, Director
Lehman College Adult Learning Center
patricia.mullen@lehman.cuny.edu (718) 960-2460

Originally sent via email: February 16, 2024

Dear Honorary Council Member **Stevens** and staff,

My name is Tricia Mullen. For the past seven years I have been the director of the Lehman College Adult Learning Center (ALC) after having been a high school social studies teacher in a different Bronx district. In the past, I served on the Economic Development and Education Committees of Bronx Community Board 8.

For 40 years, the ALC has been one of NYC's leading adult literacy programs, serving 800 community members annually providing free, high-quality courses that include English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), High School Equivalency (HSE) diploma preparation, and since 2015, free Digital Inclusion and Literacy skills development that low-literacy populations need to achieve economic self-sufficiency for their families and our community, some of whom are your constituents.

We also provide educational advising and case management for our adults who need help with social and family services to persist in achieving their goals, which you understand as a member of the General Welfare Committee.

For F25, we are submitting two proposals to address the increasing educational needs of our immigrant community. As Chair of the Committee on Children and Youth, a member of the Committee on Finance, and co-chair of the Bronx Delegation, your support for our funding requests in the Bronx Delegation and the Borough's, Council's, and Speaker's Initiatives could lead to additional free ESOL Language and ESOL Digital Literacy classes in the Bronx.

Our waiting lists are long and defer the economic justice our community deserves. Our adult learners, representing a mix of the borough's African, Caribbean, Latino, and Asian community members, enroll in our ESOL classes to make their educational goals a reality. Here is a link to some of the stories of public school parents and guardians who are currently in our ALC's free ESOL Languages and ESOL Digital Literacy classes: [Lehman College ALC.mp4.crdownload](#)

Per the attached applications (submitted electronically on February 15, 2024), we seek \$115,490 to support nine free Basic to Advanced ESOL Language classes and \$128,337 for nine free ESOL Digital Literacy classes, leading to Microsoft Office certifications. Specifically, if funded, we will hire more ESOL and Digital Inclusion and Literacy teachers, significantly impacting our Bronx community's educational and occupational futures.

I appreciate your consideration throughout this process and for providing nonprofit organizations like ours opportunities to provide free adult ESOL Language and ESOL Digital Literacy classes.

I look forward to discussing our proposals in detail with you and your staff. I will also contact other Bronx Council Members whose constituents also attend our classes.

Sincerely,

Tricia Mullen



Brooklyn Defender Services
177 Livingston St, 7th Fl
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Tel (718) 254-0700
Fax (347) 457-5194
info@bds.org

TESTIMONY OF:

**Catherine Gonzalez, Supervising Attorney and Policy Counsel
Padilla Unit, Criminal Defense Practice**

BROOKLYN DEFENDER SERVICES

Presented before

**The New York City Council
Committee on Immigration Jointly with the Committee on Hospitals**

Oversight Hearing on The Experiences of Black Migrants in New York City

April 16, 2024

My name is Catherine Gonzalez, and I am a Supervising Attorney in the Padilla Team of the Criminal Defense Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS). BDS is a public defense office whose mission is to provide outstanding representation and advocacy free of cost to people facing loss of freedom, family separation and other serious legal harms by the government. Thank you to the New York City Council Committees on Immigration and Hospitals, in particular Chair Avilés, and Chair Narcisse, for the opportunity to submit testimony today.

For over 25 years, BDS has worked, in and out of court, to protect and uphold the rights of individuals and to change laws and systems that perpetuate injustice and inequality. We represent approximately 22,000 people each year who are accused of a crime, facing loss of liberty, their home, their children, or deportation. Our staff consists of specialized attorneys, social workers, investigators, paralegals, and administrative staff who are experts in their individual fields. BDS is fortunate to have the support of the City Council to supplement the services we provide as a public defender office in Brooklyn. Through specialized units, we provide extensive wrap-around services to meet the needs of people with legal system involvement, including civil legal advocacy, assistance with educational needs of our clients or their children, housing, and benefits advocacy, as well as immigration advice and representation.

BDS' Immigration Practice works to minimize the negative immigration consequences of family court involvement and criminal charges for non-citizens, represent people in applications for immigration benefits, and defend people against ICE detention and deportation. Since 2009, we have counseled, advised, or represented more than 16,000 people in immigration matters

Brooklyn ^(BDS) Defenders

including deportation defense, affirmative applications, and immigration consequence consultations in Brooklyn’s criminal court system. Our Padilla team attorneys are criminal-immigration specialists who provide support and expertise on thousands of cases, including advocacy regarding enforcement of New York City’s detainer law, individualized immigration screenings, and legal consults.

Background

The need and timeliness for this hearing focused on the experience of recently arrived Black immigrants in New York City cannot be overstated. Just yesterday, April 15, 2024, New York City kicked off the start of Immigrant Heritage Week – a now 20-year-old annual week-long celebration during which our city celebrates the contributions of immigrant New Yorkers and commemorates “the legacy of April 17, 1907, the day in New York City history on which the largest number of immigrants – 11,000 – entered the U.S. through Ellis Island.”¹

Migration is neither a new nor recent phenomenon. As Immigrant Heritage Week denotes, people have been risking their lives and leaving their homelands in search of protection, safety, and opportunities for centuries. As New York continues to see immigrants arriving in the city from many different parts of the world, it is imperative that we acknowledge and address the challenges faced by Black immigrants who are joining our community from a wide array of countries, bringing with them diverse experiences, languages, and culture.

The Effects of Unequal Treatment at the Southern Border Reverberate all the way to New York City

“Black immigrants represent a significant, rapidly growing segment of our community in the United States, and all journey here with unique challenges, distinct backgrounds.”² Immigration policies and restrictions on entry to the United States have disproportionately targeted and excluded Black immigrants from entering the United States to seek asylum.³ Facing harsh and punitive treatment, such as automatic detention when they enter at the southern border, “U.S. immigration policies also continue to reinforce anti-Blackness through discriminatory practices,

¹ NYC Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, Immigrant Heritage Celebration 2024, <https://www.nyc.gov/site/immigrants/about/immigrant-heritage-celebration.page> (accessed on April 16, 2024)

² Tahirih Justice Center, Uplifting the Journey of Black Immigrants (February 24, 2023), available at <https://www.tahirih.org/news/uplifting-the-journey-of-black-immigrants/>

³ See Human Rights Watch, Mexico: Asylum Seekers Face Abuses at Southern Border Improve Conditions, Procedures; US Should End Pressure to Block Arrivals (June 6, 2022), available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/06/06/mexico-asylum-seekers-face-abuses-southern-border>; US Discrimination Against Black Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers at the Border and Beyond, available at ; N. Adossi, et al., “Black Lives At The Border,” Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI), January 2018, available at <https://baji.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/black-lives-at-the-borderfinal-2.pdf>; see also S. Priya Morley et al., “There is a Target on Us” – The Impact of Mexico’s Anti-Black Racism on African Migrants at Mexico’s Southern Border (2021), available at <https://www.immigrationresearch.org/system/files/The-Impact-of-Anti-Black-Racism-on-African-Migrants-at-Mexico.pdf>. <https://humanrightsfirst.org/library/cerd-us-discrimination-against-black-migrants-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-at-the-border-and-beyond/>; N. Adossi, et al., “Black Lives At The Border,” Black Alliance for Just Immigration (BAJI), January 2018, available at <https://baji.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/black-lives-at-the-borderfinal-2.pdf>; see also S. Priya Morley et al., “There is a Target on Us” – The Impact of Mexico’s Anti-Black Racism on African Migrants at Mexico’s Southern Border (2021), available at <https://www.immigrationresearch.org/system/files/The-Impact-of-Anti-Black-Racism-on-African-Migrants-at-Mexico.pdf>.

Brooklyn ^(BDS) Defenders

as demonstrated by the Border Patrol’s racist and brutal mistreatment of Haitian refugees at the U.S. southern border in the past few years.”⁴

Ms. L, a BDS client who is a native of Chad and speaks only a specific dialect of Arabic, received documents, including a notice of her first ‘check-in’ appointment with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) entirely in Spanish, a language she does not speak.

Mr. D, a BDS client who is a native of Senegal and speaks Wolof, shared documents he received from U.S. Customs and Boarder Protection (CBP) officers at the border about his immigration case are entirely in Spanish. Mr. D does not speak Spanish.

These are just two examples but represent a problem we see among many of the people we represent. We continue to encounter clients who speak French, Igbo, Wolof, Arabic, and other languages who have been given their immigration paperwork in Spanish at the border.

Heightened Policing of Recently Arrived Immigrants

It has long been established that police disproportionately target members of marginalized groups for arrest and that people of color remain disproportionately represented in the criminal legal system.⁵ Newly arriving Black immigrant New Yorkers are living in highly policed and surveilled situations whether they find themselves in shelters or experiencing street-based homelessness.

The ensnaring of Black immigrants into the New York criminal legal system reflects the mistreatment they faced when they arrived at the border where the risk of detention and fear of deportation loom large. Black immigrant New Yorkers, those who have newly arrived and as well as those who have lived here for decades, are experiencing increased rates of ICE apprehension, as biased policing practices intersect with current ICE enforcement priorities prioritize both people who recently arrived and people who have contact with the criminal legal system. BDS continues to see an increase in ICE arrests in the community. Pursuant to current ICE enforcement guidelines, a growing number of noncitizens being detained in ICE custody after an arrest or other contact with the criminal legal system.

Involvement in the criminal legal system and family court can have devastating consequences for a recently arrived immigrant. An arrest alone, even where the District Attorney’s office declines to prosecute or where a judge dismisses and seals the case, can have dire consequences for people facing removal, including leading an asylum seeker to end up in immigration detention.

⁴ Tahirih Justice Center, *Tahirih Updates*, “Uplifting the Journey of Black Immigrants,” (February 24, 2023) available at <https://www.tahirih.org/news/uplifting-the-journey-of-black-immigrants/>

⁵ NYCLU, “A Racial Disparity Across New York that is Truly Jarring,” (November 29, 2022) available at <https://www.nyclu.org/commentary/racial-disparity-across-new-york-truly-jarring#:~:text=Felony%20Convictions%20by%20Race&text=And%20Latinx%20people%20were%20convicted,record%20and%20who%20doesn't.>



ICE and its predecessor, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), have long relied upon state and local criminal legal systems to identify immigrants who could be deported.

Challenges That Stem from Unstable Immigration Status

Compounding the challenges Black immigrants face from discrimination and racial prejudice, are the numerous barriers that many face due to unstable immigration status.⁶ Lack of immigration relief directly impact so many aspects of a person’s life and wellbeing – from access to healthcare, to employment and safe housing.

We have been encountering many clients who are ineligible for forms of relief that provide immediate access to employment authorization, such as Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Humanitarian Parole, because they are from countries that lack or have not been designated with any protective status by the federal government. As a result, they require full legal immigration representation, and right now must go on our waitlist for full immigration representation.

Recommendations

BDS supports Int 0084-2024, Int 0085-2024 and Int 0739-2024 as important steps towards ensuring an improved approach to welcoming and supporting immigrants to our city. Additionally, BDS supports Res 0340-2024 and the city’s call to our federal government to enact a more humanitarian-centered approach to meet the needs of Black immigrants arriving at our borders seeking protection.

Conclusion

BDS is grateful to New York City Council’s Committees on Immigration and Hospitals for hosting this important and timely hearing. Thank you for your time and consideration of our comments. We look forward to further discussing these and other issues that impact the people and communities we serve. If you have any additional questions, please contact Catherine Gonzalez, Supervising Attorney and Policy Counsel, at cgonzalez@bds.org.

⁶ Tahirih Justice Center, *Tahirih Updates*, “Uplifting the Journey of Black Immigrants,” (February 24, 2023) available at <https://www.tahirih.org/news/uplifting-the-journey-of-black-immigrants/>



Bushwick City Farm (BCF)
354 Stockton St., Brooklyn, NY 11206
bcfarmevents@gmail.com

Dear members of the City Council Committee on Immigration,

Thank you, chair Avilés, for taking on this important issue and for listening to us today.

We're volunteers at [Bushwick City Farm](#) (BCF), an urban community garden located across the street from the NYCHA Sumner houses in the Bed-Stuy/Bushwick border, built on Earth Day 2011, when concerned community members began cleaning up the lot that had been abandoned for over a decade, to turn it into a farm. Since then BCF has given away thousands of pounds of free organic produce, clothing, eggs, and local honey to the community. Over the years, we've helped build gardens in NYCHA housing and have collaborated with other local gardens, public schools and community organizations.

Our community is a food apartheid zone with limited access to affordable healthy, locally grown, organic food. BCF invites all neighbors to participate in growing and harvesting healthy food, serving as a model for sustainable urban food production. The farm also is also a [third place](#),* an oasis in a rapidly gentrifying area that lacks green community spaces. BCF is a unique space where people of diverse backgrounds gather and get to know each other, fostering harmony and cooperation within the neighborhood through shared care of the space.

Since last June 2023, BCF has also become an actual [respite area for asylum seekers](#) primarily from the Stockton migrant "respite center" across the street and from other Brooklyn migrant shelters. The majority of asylum seekers that frequent BCF are French, Pulaar, Wolof-speaking Black West and North African and have been subjected to xenophobic, racial and linguistic discrimination by shelter staff and security, who reproduce carceral conditions inside the shelters and "respite" centers, forcing people to seek resources and community outside of the shelters walls.

Furthermore, after becoming involved in mutual aid efforts, we at BCF have sourced shower access, ESL lessons, clothes, shoes and food donations, language interpretation/translation and other goods and services. This speaks to the lack of case management and services available in these shelters. However, for the last several months BCF's space has been in heavy daily use (for cooking and spending time) by asylum seekers from all over the city, many of whom have been made homeless by the Mayor's office [inhumane 30 shelter limit policy](#)*** and spend the night outdoors at the farm and on the streets nearby. Without enough material and language support our current volunteers are overwhelmed and the farm has gone into serious disrepair.

Adams' Asylum Seeker State of Emergency, that has allowed him to grant no-bid contracts to private companies and subcontractors and that has enabled policies like the 30/60 day limit in shelters should end. Asylum seekers deserve a dignified place to live and stable housing NOW!



Bushwick City Farm (BCF)
354 Stockton St., Brooklyn, NY 11206
bcfarmevents@gmail.com

Lastly, we would like to express our support for the long overdue bills Int 0084-2024 and Int 0085-2024 and local law T2024-0739.

*As Oldenburg notes, third spaces are locales essential for community life and vitality. Discernible from first spaces (homes) and second spaces (work place), third spaces serve as respites where people gather and interact (*The Great Good Place*, 1989).

**<https://gothamist.com/news/asylum-seekers-in-sweltering-bushwick-rely-on-kindness-of-strangers>

***<https://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/testimony-of-new-york-city-comptroller-brad-lander-at-the-new-york-city-council-committee-on-general-welfare-hearing-on-intro-210-2024/>



Testimony

**New York City Council
Committees on Immigration and Hospitals
Hearing on Oversight: The Experiences of Black Migrants in New York City**

Tuesday, April 16, 2024

Submitted by

**Lauren Wyatt, Managing Attorney, Access to Justice Initiatives &
Sandra Dieudonné, Supervising Attorney, Haitian Response Initiative**

**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services, New York**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on behalf of Catholic Charities Community Services about the experience of Black migrants in New York City. We are Lauren Wyatt, Managing Attorney of Access to Justice Initiatives, and Sandra Dieudonné, Supervising Attorney of the Haitian Response Initiative. We represent Catholic Charities Community Services, Archdiocese of New York. Today's testimony will focus specifically on our legal services programs.

INTRODUCTION

Catholic Charities is proud of our decades-long tradition of welcoming New York's immigrants and refugees. Our services have tremendous impact on communities across New York City. The scope and diversity of our services is exceptional.

Through Catholic Charities programs, Black migrants in New York City have access to a variety of legal services, social services, English language classes, workforce development and support, housing assistance, food support, and other services. However, the recent arrival of more than 180,000 asylum seekers to New York City and the changing populations of asylum seekers have had profound impacts across our programming spaces as we seek to meet those populations' needs.

Through our legal services programming and legal hotlines, we provide services to thousands of Black migrants each year, including new arrivals to New York City and long-term residents. In 2022 and 2023, we provided direct legal services to more than 2,200 newly arrived Black migrants,

including families, single adults, and unaccompanied children, from Haiti, Guinea, Jamaica, the Central African Republic, Senegal, Guinea, The Gambia, Ghana, and other countries.

Barriers to language access are at the root of many of the issues that Black migrants, particularly those from African countries and Haiti, face in accessing legal and other services. We are grateful for New York City's efforts to address these issues and its support of Black migrants through legal, language access, and other programs.

Haitian Asylum Seekers in New York City

Haitian immigrants in New York City receive high-quality legal services through Catholic Charities' Haitian Response Initiative (HRI). HRI was launched in late 2021 in partnership with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, in recognition of the disparate treatment of Haitian immigrants in the U.S. and the federal immigration system, and following widely publicized abuses against Haitians by Customs and Border Patrol in 2021. Catholic Charities and nine community-based organizations form the HRI Coalition which, together with the ActionNYC hotline, provides wraparound services that include legal services, direct aid, and resources to help Haitian immigrants navigate pathways for and secure employment, housing, and other necessities, ensuring that critical services are provided to a historically overlooked and underserved immigrant group.

Legal Services Provided:

- Catholic Charities provides a range of legal services to Haitians, including community-based legal clinics to ensure that they can get services in their communities; accurate legal information to protect against immigration fraud and scams; legal representation in asylum, Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and other cases; and pro se application assistance.
- Our legal services bridge a significant gap in access to legal services for Haitian migrants. HRI is well-known in the New York Haitian community, and newcomers often come to Catholic Charities for legal help within days of arriving in New York.
- HRI is staffed entirely by fluent Haitian Creole speakers, ensuring that linguistically appropriate services are provided without the need for interpreters.
- Since January 2022, HRI has screened 1,002 Haitian immigrants, filed 1,011 immigration applications, and accepted 114 cases for full representation.

Challenges and Unmet Needs:

- Despite the city's commitment to providing services to Haitian migrants, Catholic Charities is not able to meet the extensive need for legal services. To date, HRI has received legal referrals for more than 2,500 newly arrived Haitians and their families.
- Given our limited capacity and staffing of just two attorneys plus support staff, HRI's waiting list is now 1,680 people. Because of HRI, Catholic Charities often can bridge the gap in access to legal information that Haitians face due to language access issues, but we cannot substitute for the immigrant court.
- Haitian migrants are negatively impacted by language access both inside and outside the immigration legal system. In immigration court, hearings frequently are rescheduled because of a lack of available Haitian Creole interpreters. In addition, many Haitian migrants are pressured to proceed with French interpretation, despite advising the court that they are not fluent in French. As a result, these Haitian migrants are navigating their

removal proceedings in a language they do not fully understand or speak.

- We know of at least several cases in which immigration judges have refused to terminate removal proceedings for Haitians with TPS. One Haitian couple was ordered removed despite presenting their TPS approvals to the judge and requesting termination. In each of these cases, the respondents did not have criminal or other histories that would explain declining to terminate. Catholic Charities has not encountered this with TPS recipients from other countries, whose cases the judges routinely terminate.
- Through HRI, we see that Haitian migrants often face significant challenges obtaining benefits and services to which they are entitled. For example, healthcare professionals generally do not provide documents in Haitian Creole, and we have frequently seen Haitians who were provided medical information and records written only in English and Spanish.
- Haitians with TPS, who are entitled to work authorization and Social Security numbers, often are turned away from Social Security offices because staff did not wish to call interpreters to assist. This also has happened at Medicaid and the city's IDNYC offices.

African Asylum Seekers in New York City

The majority of new arrivals from African countries seek Catholic Charities' legal services through our Access to Justice Initiatives, which was formed to address quickly shifting political, legal, and demographic landscapes and to provide appropriate services for emerging legal needs. Currently, approximately 30% of the new arrivals we encounter through our Access to Justice and other legal programs are from African countries, a dramatic increase over previous years. Many come from Guinea, Senegal, and Mauritania; and often speak languages that we rarely have encountered previously, including Fulani, Wolof, and Pular. Most African migrants that we see are adults traveling by themselves, and they overwhelmingly have strong asylum claims.

Legal Services Provided:

- Catholic Charities serves African migrants through multiple programs located at the immigration courts, our offices, community locations, and remotely.
- We provide legal representation, pro se assistance, and/or consultations to thousands of asylum seekers and other immigrants each year. We also provide critical information about available relief and deadlines, and connections to social services and pro bono counsel.
- We regularly accompany African migrants and other asylum seekers without attorneys to their immigration hearings through our Friend of the Court program.
- Catholic Charities' legal programs help fill a critical role in providing information and advice to African and other migrants who are not be able to obtain attorneys as they move through the immigration process.
- In 2023, Catholic Charities accepted more than 375 immigration cases of African asylum seekers for legal representation. We provided pro se assistance to more than 300 others. We expect those numbers to increase significantly in 2024.

Challenges and Unmet Needs:

- Many of our programs historically have encountered predominantly Spanish speakers, and we are equipped to serve those populations with bilingual staff. Serving third language speakers (i.e., people who speak neither Spanish nor English) has required us to change our

service model to use more interpreters, which is more time consuming and costly.

- While we are able to help thousands of individuals each year, due to limited capacity and funding we turn away an average of approximately 60 asylum seekers each day from our court-based services alone. Approximately 20 of those, on average, are African migrants.
- Although the African migrants we have spoken with overwhelmingly have strong asylum claims, we have seen that immigration attorneys often are less likely to accept these cases, perhaps because they are unfamiliar with the relevant countries' histories.
- Many immigration court hearings are repeatedly rescheduled for African migrants due to a lack of available interpreters. The New York City courts do not have in-person interpreters for many African languages, and telephonic interpreters are regularly unavailable. As a result, many African respondents are told at multiple hearings, after traveling to and waiting in line for hours at the court, that no interpreter is available, and they will be rescheduled.
- For many respondents, the judge is the first official they encounter who will advise them of important requirements and deadlines, such as the one-year asylum filing deadline. Repeatedly rescheduling respondents due to lack of interpreters results in significant delays to learning this information and enabling respondents to prepare.
- African immigrants routinely are sent from the courtroom, where they were not able to receive information in their respective languages, to Catholic Charities' Immigration Court Helpdesk (ICH). ICH cannot, and is not intended to, serve everyone, and we are not able to substitute for the government in communicating with all non-Spanish speakers.
- In well-intentioned efforts to secure interpreters for uncommon languages, immigration judges often schedule respondents for final hearings, because the court's system prioritizes those interpreter requests. The judge then will use that time for a preliminary hearing. Unfortunately, many respondents do not understand this and are confused; and attorneys who might have taken those cases may be less likely to, given what appears to be a short time to prepare.
- We have met many respondents who were required to have USCIS credible fear interviews (CFIs) about their asylum claims in languages they could not understand, because no appropriate interpreters were available. CFIs are a crucial step in an asylum claim, and lack of understanding can undermine a legitimate claim.
- We also have seen the impact of limited language access affect African immigrants in other settings, such as healthcare, where documents generally are provided in English and sometimes Spanish, but not in languages that third language speakers can understand.

We urge New York City to:

- Increase funding for interpreters, so that newcomers to the city can receive services such as IDNYC.
- Increase funding to expand legal services, so that Catholic Charities and other legal services providers are better able to meet the significant need for legal assistance.
- Actively recruit and certify qualified interpreters for non-Spanish languages.
- Urge the federal government to ensure adequate interpretation services in immigration courts, Social Security offices, and other federal agencies that serve Black migrants.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your commitment to serving asylum seekers and addressing the unmet needs of Black migrants in New York City. If you have any questions about our testimony, please contact us at lauren.wyatt@catholiccharitiesny.org and Sandra.Dieudonne@catholiccharitiesny.org. We look forward to working with you to advance the needs of New York City's most vulnerable populations.

April 16, 2024
Committee on Immigration and Hospitals
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

**NYC Council Committee on Immigration
I-ARC Testimony Re: The Experiences of Black Migrants in NYC
April 16, 2024**

Good morning, members of the New York City Council. My name is Nneka Okpara and I am the Black Immigrants' Initiatives Fellow at Immigrant ARC ("I-ARC").

[Immigrant ARC](#) (I-ARC) is a coalition of over 80 member organizations that provide legal services across the state of New York. Our mission is to increase access to justice and access to legal counsel for immigrant New Yorkers by mobilizing New York's legal service providers and addressing the systemic barriers to justice that immigrants face.

I started my fellowship at Immigrant ARC in December of 2022. At the start of my fellowship, I conducted research that was focused on understanding the needs and barriers black immigrants face here in New York City (and abroad). In conjunction with my own work experience as a practicing immigration attorney, and through speaking with other legal service providers, community organizations, and members of the black migrant community, there was one throughline that was made clear underlying every issue: **Black Immigrants are largely forgotten and invisible when it comes to the conversation about immigration in this country. Black immigrants are not a monolith. Each community has unique needs and challenges, but these are some issues the communities face as a whole.** In New York City, this invisibility has left the struggles black migrants face largely unaccounted for, which in turn means black migrant needs are not being met and resources are not being created for them or the organizations that serve them. The City is not providing the resources and their needs are not being met. There is a lack of readily accessible resources available to the community and service providers—resources that are available to other migrant groups.

In my research of New York City, I have found that:

- a. Black migrants need greater access to legal resources and representation for incoming black migrants;
- b. There is lack of adequate language access for black migrant languages;
- c. Black migrants experience much more racial profiling, bias, and interaction with the criminal justice system;
- d. The City's administration who have been tasked with adjudicating black migrant immigration cases shows a marked lack of knowledge and cultural competency regarding home country issues;
- e. There is a clear disparity between the treatment of black migrant case outcomes and that of migrants from other ethnic backgrounds;
- f. There is a need for accurate and reliable information to be disseminated to black migrant communities; and
- g. There is an urgent need for more shelter and housing.

It cannot be underscored more emphatically how important it is for immigrants to have legal representation in

immigration court in order to improve their chances of winning their claims. The New York Immigrant Representation Study found that, “the two most important variables affecting the ability to secure a successful outcome in a case (defined as relief or termination) [is] having representation or being free from detention.” Moreover, of those who are represented and released or never detained, 74% have successful outcomes. For those who are unrepresented but released or never detained, the number drops dramatically to only 13% having a successful outcome. And for those unrepresented and detained, only 3% have a successful outcome. In order for black migrants to have a fair shot to thoroughly and adequately represent their cases in court, they must have access to legal representation and resources. As will be mentioned below, an understanding of the issues many black migrants are seeking asylum from back in their home countries is often unknown or not understood by immigration officials in charge of adjudicating their cases. Thus, having access to a legal representative who can help black migrants navigate the confusing immigration process and convey to the adjudicator the aspects of their case and immigration story to highlight is vital. **Black migrant fears and claims are valid, and they deserve a fair chance at making that known.**

This is why Immigrant ARC urges the City to fund long-term immigration legal services and supports the Council’s call for the Mayor to restore his funding cuts and allocate an additional \$50 million for immigration legal services in the FY25 City Budget, which includes the following:

- **Invest \$58 million for immigration legal services** to ensure that immigrants receive continuity of services and no one falls through the cracks of our complex and punitive immigration system. The breakdown of the funding goes to the following city-wide initiatives:
 - **\$31 million** for the Mayor’s Immigrant Opportunities Initiative, which have been threatened by budget cuts while including such crucial programs like the Action NYC and the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative
 - **\$16.6 million** for the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP), a first-in-the-nation program that provides free immigration legal services to low-income New Yorkers.
 - **\$4.9 million** for I-CARE, which provides representation to unaccompanied minors and families in removal proceedings.
 - **\$3.3 million** for CUNY Citizenship NOW!, which provides free legal services to people on their path to citizenship.
 - **\$2.6 million** for the City Council’s Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI), which provides legal services to recently arrived immigrants to assist them in applications for citizenship or permanent residency.
- **Invest an additional \$50 million to support emergency immigration legal services** to meet the needs of the City’s newest immigrant residents.
- **Invest \$1 million in a pilot program** to provide immigration legal services clients with wraparound and holistic case management services. The pilot program would:
 - **Fill the social services gap** for immigrant communities seeking legal aid, including by allowing legal service providers to hire social workers to work with them on individual cases.
 - **Include case management and representation assistance** to help immigrant New Yorkers navigate housing supports, benefits, education, and health care systems.

There is an urgent need for comprehensive language access for black immigrants as they do their best to navigate through the complex immigration system. The lack of access to black migrant language interpreters harms the quality of representation and number of services black migrants can expect to receive. Many legal service providers and community-based organizations (CBOs) that do outreach to black immigrants only have Spanish translators on hand, and very few have French translators. It is rare, especially for non Black led organizations, to have translators available for those who speak Haitian Creole, Arawakan (Garifuna language), and the number of regional dialects many African migrants speak such as Wolof, Soninke, Pulaar, Twi, Hausa, Lingala, Bambara, and Fulani to name a few. This means that important legal documents, such as those regarding the process of applying for asylum or other forms of relief, are read to black migrants in a language they don't understand and they miss out on benefits, cannot access, and/or are not informed of their rights due to the language barrier. "Both immigrants and city and CBO workers reported that language remained the main obstacle to immigrants' use of public benefits . . . Linguistic and cultural barriers prevented immigrants from gathering the information regarding benefits and services, which perpetuated misinformation."¹ There are organizations and co-ops that are doing their best to fill the gaps with interpreters and translators, often working with members of the community to get them trained as certified interpreters. Thus, there is a need for the City to fund and highlight these organizations so that they can expand their reach in the black migrant community in the number of languages they can service and make it the standard that these diverse black migrant languages are always included in any default materials that are handed to black migrants once they arrive in New York City.

It should come as no surprise that black immigrants experience racial bias and discrimination in the immigration and criminal justice system at a rate higher than their counterparts. They face a double burden of moving through the American system as both black individuals and as immigrants. They are profiled in discriminatory ways twice over. "For Black immigrants, life in the U.S. often means being encircled by the same systems of criminalization, profiling, and over-policing as Black Americans."² Black migrants reported that they are routinely racially profiled by the police, both in Mexico (where many wait for their chance to enter the U.S.) and in the United States. This over-policing occurs irrespective of whether they are in areas where they are the minority or the majority. They are stopped without cause and asked to produce their documents. Despite only making up around 7 percent of the non-citizen population, Black immigrants represent over 20 percent of those in deportation proceedings on criminal grounds. Black immigrants are often denied bond, or, if they are lucky, given extremely high bonds with high interest, then are made to wear ankle monitors, again, like criminals. Thus, many black migrants serve double time: time in jail or prison then, time in immigration detention.

Practitioners reported that there seems to be a general lack of knowledge by both asylum officers and immigration judges on the issues black migrants are facing in their home countries. Thus, asylum officers would benefit from a training on the issues black migrants face back home and although immigration judges undergo an annual training, there is still a lack of cultural competency they routinely display. There is a need for some sort of accountability for immigration judges-- to hold them accountable in balancing the REAL ID Act and the actuality of cultural competency as that plays an active role in how a black migrant may be perceived in an immigration proceeding. Things such as body language, sensitivity around discussing a topic that is usually

¹Center for Migration Studies, *Immigrants' Use of New York City Programs, Services, and Benefits: Examining the Impact of Fear and Other Barriers to Access*, by Daniela Alulema and Jacquelyn Pavilon, (Jan. 22, 2022). Available at <https://cmsny.org/publications/nyc-programs-services-and-benefits-report-013122>.

*Note, though this study concerns immigrants accessing public benefits overall, its relevance is readily applicable here.

² ACLU, *For Black Immigrants, Police and ICE Are Two Sides of the Same Coin*, by Ashoka Mukpo, (Sept. 3, 2020). Available at <https://www.aclu.org/news/criminal-law-reform/for-black-immigrants-police-and-ice-are-two-sides-of-the-same-coin>.

deemed taboo, familial or societal pressure due to their gender or perceived social status can carry over and dictate how they conduct themselves even now that they are here in the City, and especially in an immigration proceeding. The City should do whatever is within their power to urge immigration officials to hold themselves to account and truly educate themselves on these cultural norms so they can fairly and justly adjudicate cases that come before them.

“Black migrants suffer unfair and cruel treatment by racist U.S. immigration policies when seeking safety from gang-related violence, political instability, and extreme disasters.”³ Black immigrants are either generally ignored in immigrant aid responses or given the least amount of resources. One practitioner noted that more countries, such as Congolese migrants, should be given Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and doesn’t understand why they haven’t been given it. Regarding Haitians and TPS, compared to their counterparts receiving TPS, Haitian TPS cases have notoriously taken quite a substantial amount of time longer than other countries to be adjudicated. Practitioners reported that at times it takes so long to receive a response from USCIS, that by the time applicants receive a response, they might only have two more months left on their employment authorization documents/TPS status before it expires. Comparatively, Ukrainian TPS applications seem to get top priority and speed. Venezuelans and Afghan TPS are reportedly also slow, but still adjudicated faster than Haitians on average. There is a general consensus for the need for Legal/Know Your Rights (KYR) informational presentations to be conducted for members of the black immigrant communities, and that these presentations be held in areas and spaces accessible to the black immigrant population so they can be adequately educated and informed about their options for relief as well as any social services available to them. These KYRs presentations, again, need to be staffed with interpreters who speak the languages of those attending the sessions.

There is a severe lack of resources for social services, including shelter and long-term housing, social workers and case managers for black migrants. These services are crucial in order to help them successfully navigate and establish a life in the City. Many black migrants are having trouble finding food, finding a place to stay, or obtaining identification documents which are a prerequisite to access a myriad of services. This lack of stability is exacerbated during the period migrants are not able to work as they have not yet received work authorization—if they qualify—or because their work authorization expiration date is rapidly approaching and employers refuse to hire them or keep them on the job, thus making it impossible to earn money to pay for housing, food, and other basic needs. Many black migrants end up staying in hotels and/or mosques because they can’t access housing elsewhere. This underscores the need to make the shelter system more easily accessible and also expand the number of beds available in a given shelter on any given day. It can get very dangerous for black migrants without housing. They fall victim to harassment and over-policing based on racial profiling, or are exposed to health and safety issues when due to extreme conditions.

As New York City is home to the largest population of black migrants in any metropolitan area, it is incumbent on the City to make strides towards addressing the aforementioned issues, amongst many others that will be highlighted before the Committee today by all those in attendance. It is important to set an example of what other cities around the nation can and ought to do to aid Black migrants who are looking for a better life for themselves and their families. This City’s greatest strength and legacy is that it has always been a home to immigrants. Black immigrants matter just as much as anyone else. I urge the Committee to commit to changing

³ Democracy Now!, *Documents Reveal ICE Officers’ Racist and Violent Language Against Black Asylum Seekers*, (Feb. 7, 2023). Available at https://www.democracynow.org/2023/2/7/headlines/documents_reveal_ice_officers_racist_and_violent_language_against_black_asylum_seekers.

what has been the prevailing negative rhetoric against black migrants (and migrants in general) in the past few years and to honor its welcoming legacy so that those seeking a better life may be able to experience the American Dream.



April 19, 2024

Committees on Immigration and on Hospitals
New York City Council
City Hall
New York, NY

Re: April 16, 2024 Hearing on the Experiences of Black Asylum-Seekers in New York City

Dear Committee on Immigration and Committee on Hospitals:

Please accept these written comments for the April 16, 2024 hearing about the experiences of Black asylum-seekers in New York City.

My name is Rex Chen and I am the Director of Immigration at Legal Services NYC (LSNYC). We are the largest civil legal services provider in the country. For over 50 years, we have fought poverty in New York City and sought racial, social, and economic justice for low-income New Yorkers. We provide free civil legal services of various kinds, including immigration legal services, to over 100,000 people per year.

I thank the Committee and in particular Councilmembers Ayala and Rivera for convening this hearing on such a pressing topic and giving voice to people who are so often voiceless in our great city.

Black Migrants Face Systemic, Structural, and Societal Anti-Black Racism in NYC

Black asylum-seekers in NYC face a confluence of issues. Like all Black people in New York, they must contend with systemic, structural, and societal anti-Black racism.

That problem is then compounded by other axes of oppression and vulnerability: their immigration status, societal xenophobia and anti-immigrant sentiment, and an extreme lack of resources. These forces can combine to put Black asylum-seekers in New York City in a uniquely vulnerable and sometimes dangerous situation.

For example, at any given subway station near a HERRC shelter right now, one is likely to find a group of mostly young, Black recent-arrivals standing by the turnstiles hoping someone will swipe them through. These are people with no resources simply trying to build a life for themselves, likely fleeing violence or persecution, and seeking immigration relief, refuge, work, and a roof over their head. They are in the subway looking for a way to get to an immigration lawyer or to go out and look for work. In so doing, they are doing *precisely* those things that Mayor Adams is currently requiring of all homeless single adult new arrivals to avoid literal street homelessness. However, the City does not give these men Metrocards or any other means of getting around the City. Meanwhile, the Adams Administration is flooding the subway with police and the Governor has called in the National Guard. As we are all now well aware, the NYPD overwhelmingly and disproportionately arrest Blacks and Latino men for fare evasion. Thus, the Adams Administration is essentially boxing people in—forcing them into a heavily policed subway system without the means to pay their fare—in a way that’s particularly dangerous for young Black men. In addition, fare evasion citations can have serious consequences for asylum-seekers’ immigration legal cases. In this way, the 30-day shelter stay rule combined with the overpolicing of fare evasion endangers Black asylum-seekers.

Moreover, the plight of Black asylum seekers is being politicized and used to divide NYC to further xenophobic agendas, to stoke racial resentments and using racialized language and fear mongering to paint asylum-seekers as criminals who are menacing residential neighborhoods. This dangerous, racist rhetoric will only get worse as election season nears.

Black Asylum-Seekers Struggle With Unique Challenges Accessing Services

Black asylum-seekers also face a unique constellation of problems: a lack of language access and cultural competency in NYC shelters, and a lack of access to immigration legal services outside of shelters. Shelters and public agencies often struggle to provide adequate interpretation and translation services in many of the languages predominantly spoken by Black asylum-seekers, such as Wolof and Arabic. This makes it disproportionately difficult for Black asylum-seekers to communicate with shelter workers, and thus retain their shelter housing, and poses similar barriers to obtaining other public benefits. Moreover, a lack of cultural competency makes staying in shelters hard – for example, a lack of access to halal food or an inability to communicate with shelter workers around Ramadan-related scheduling changes makes it difficult for Black asylum-seekers to remain in City shelters while honoring their religions.

But Black asylum-seekers also face unique challenges outside the shelter system. Many Black asylum-seekers have resorted to sleeping in mosques. But because they are no longer staying in a City shelter, the City no longer provides them with access to certain immigration legal services, making it near-impossible for them to obtain the representation and advice they need to obtain immigration relief and get back on their

feet. Moreover, unique language barriers can create a steep barrier for Black asylum-seekers to finding employment and developing community ties to help them avoid isolation while they pursue immigration relief.

Continued Anti-Black Bias in Immigration Court

Finally, for those Black asylum-seekers who do manage to get a hearing in immigration court, the deck is still stacked against them, because anti-Black bias does not stop at the courthouse doors. Anti-Black bias affects the entire immigration legal system, from bond decisions to deportation rulings. For example, a recent study found significant racial disparities in how often immigrants are released from detention and how often they are ordered to be deported.¹

As a result, Legal Services NYC has begun training our lawyers and other immigration legal services providers around the country about how to interrupt anti-Black bias in immigration hearings. In March 2024, LSNYC gave a training titled Anti-Black Unconscious Bias by Immigration Judges: How Lawyers Can Interrupt Bias During Closing Arguments. The training included co-presenters from LSNYC, UndocuBlack Network, and CUNY Law School along with a dozen facilitators from around the country.

While this kind of training is not enough to remove bias from the immigration legal process, many Black asylum-seekers do not even have access to a lawyer at all, let

¹ Ryo, Emily and Peacock, Ian and Ley, Weston and Levesque, Christopher, Racial Disparities in Crime-Based Removal Proceedings (March 7, 2024) (available at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4751598> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4751598>).

alone one that receives this kind of training. To that end, culturally-competent immigration legal services is a critical need for Black asylum-seekers.

Sincerely,

Rex Chen
Immigration Director
Legal Services NYC
40 Worth Street, Suite 606
New York, NY 10013



To: Committee on Immigration

From: Phylisa Wisdom, Executive Director, New York Jewish Agenda (NYJA)

Dear Council Member Avilés and Committee on Immigration,

Thank you for considering written testimony from New York Jewish Agenda (NYJA), a non-profit organization committed to amplifying the voice of the liberal New York Jewish community whose shared values motivate them to promote social justice. Our work includes support for refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers in our city, state, and country through our membership in the Synagogue Coalition on the Refugee and Immigration Crisis (SCRIC), in addition to other social justice policy work

New York Jewish Agenda calls for increased budget allocations in the city budget for programs that serve Black asylum seekers; we are dismayed by the lack of resources that have been provided to asylum seekers, particularly those from countries who have not received protections like those granted to Venezuelan immigrants by the Biden administration. NYJA is in favor of granting federal Work Authorization and Temporary Protected Status to West African asylum seekers.

New York Jewish agenda has heard from members of the Synagogue Coalition on the Refugee and Immigration Crisis who serve thousands of new arrivals first-hand that language services for asylum seekers are inadequate in New York. Moreover, many new arrivals from West Africa face a particularly difficult language barrier due to the fact that many of the charities offering services in New York have a greater capacity to offer Spanish language services rather than the languages many West African asylum seekers speak like Wolof, French, Arabic, and more. We hope that the City's response going forward will be more welcoming to those facing language barriers and that it will provide better language access across all services and notices. NYJA also calls for more workforce development that is accessible to Afro-indigenous languages.

Finally, NYJA hopes that the City will eliminate the 30-day and 60-day shelter limits for new asylum seekers as we are hearing, as you likely are, that that is not enough time to

start providing for themselves given the other challenges they are facing as stated above.

Thank you again for considering our testimony and for holding a hearing to learn about the challenges and barriers facing West African asylum seekers in our city. We have listed our goals again below and urge the City Council to pass a budget that allows for a productive response to the Asylum Seeker crisis:

- Increased money in the city budget for programs that serve Black asylum seekers
- Increased language access across all services and notices
- More workforce development that is accessible to Afro-indigenous languages
- Federal Advocacy for Work Authorization and Temporary Protected Status
- Elimination of the 30-Day (and 60-day) shelter limit

Sincerely,

Phylisa Wisdom, Executive Director

New York Jewish Agenda



New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
151 West 30th Street, 11th Floor
New York, NY 10001-4017

Testimony of Arielle Wisbaum, Health Justice Staff Attorney, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest Before the New York City Council’s Committees on Immigration and Hospitals

**April 16, 2024, Oversight:
The Experiences of Black Migrants in New York**

My name is Arielle Wisbaum, and I am a staff attorney at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI). I work in NYLPI’s UndocuCare TGNCI+ program, a program striving to ensure that immigrant New Yorkers who are transgender, gender-nonconforming, intersex (TGNCI), or who are living with HIV can obtain and sustain access to gender-affirming healthcare, HIV care, and housing through immigration legal advocacy.¹ I want to thank you for the opportunity to present testimony about some of the barriers that the community members we work with encounter and how New York City can better respond to their needs. Our testimony today is informed by our clients’ and community partners’ experiences. We are especially grateful to the Black Alliance for Justice Immigration (BAJI) and UndocuBlack for prioritizing the lives of Black migrants and reporting information crucial to fighting for an immigration system that is not fueled by racism and nativism.

A significant number of the immigrant LGBTQ+ New Yorkers we work with at NYLPI are seeking asylum and have survived extraordinary violence and persecution in their lives merely for expressing their true gender or sexuality. Those in need of gender-affirming healthcare in their home countries often did not have the opportunity to seek this lifesaving care due to safety concerns, or it was simply unavailable to them; and those in need of HIV medication frequently encountered discriminatory denials of treatment. The violence asylum seekers have endured in their lives often leaves them with trauma related symptoms such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), and anxiety. For these reasons, immediate access to gender-affirming healthcare for LGBTQ+ asylum seekers, including mental healthcare, is a basic need that New York City can and must fulfill. Furthermore, our leaders must see housing as healthcare, acknowledging the reality that housing instability exacerbates physical and mental health conditions and can result in something as

¹ See a resource which may be useful to constituents of Committee Members: The Center for Urban Pedagogy and New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, *Healthcare is For You!*, available at: <https://www.nylpi.org/undocare-cup-resource-launch-healthcare-is-for-you/>.

grave as an asylum seeker's deportation to a country of impending persecution for lack of a stable address.

Black LGBTQ+ immigrants in the United States face compounded prejudices due to anti-Black racism, including higher rates of criminalization, prolonged detention, and deportation than other migrant populations.² 76% of Black migrants are deported because of contact with the police and the criminal legal system.³ Surviving and overcoming laws in their countries of origin⁴ which criminalize homosexuality and gender identity—laws often implemented by invading colonial governments—Black LGBTQ+ migrants may come to the U.S. seeking an opportunity to thrive, but unfortunately are met with circumstances that can replicate those from which they fled.

In the United States, Black migrants are detained at the highest rates and have the highest bond amounts.⁵ Prolonged periods of detention exacerbate trauma and sustain an environment of fear which often leaves LGBTQ+ migrants feeling like they must conceal their true gender or sexuality, resulting in dire consequences on applications for asylum when an adjudicator is unaware of the basis of the applicant's fear of return. This was the case for NYLPI's client C.N.—a 20-year-old fleeing Nigeria after suffering death threats and a beating because local criminal groups suspected he was gay. C.N. could not make it through even an initial stage of the U.S. asylum process known as a "Credible Fear Interview" because in detention, he continued to conceal his true sexuality upon hearing homophobic statements from cellmates. He never had an opportunity to explore or express his true sexual identity in detention due to the oppressive conditions of the U.S. immigration system. Despite NYLPI's efforts to fight C.N.'s impending removal from the U.S., C.N. was deported. The unfortunate reality is that for many detained Black and LGBTQ+ migrants at this early stage in the asylum process, it is likely that they will never have contact with an immigration attorney, since federally, there is no right to immigration defense representation.

For Black and LGBTQ+ immigrants who are not detained or who are released from detention on bond or parole, immediate connection to supportive services that reduce stigma, safe housing, and experienced immigration legal service providers are crucial to survival and embrace basic human rights. Upon entry to the U.S. or release from immigration detention, LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and those living with HIV may choose New York City as their destination due to its reputation for having LGBTQ+ community support networks and affirming healthcare access. However, several barriers continue to stand in the way of asylum seekers needing this care, including cruel shelter eviction policies or shelter conditions which perpetuate discrimination and harassment against Black and LGBTQ+ migrants, inequitable access to

² Goff *et al*, The UndocuBlack Network, "Uncovering the Truth, Violence and Abuse Against Black Migrants in Immigration Detention," (Oct. 2022), *available* at: <https://baji.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Uncovering-the-Truth.pdf>.

³ *Id.*

⁴ These nations include Angola, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, the Republic of the Congo, and Sierra Leone.

Id.

⁵ *Id.*

healthcare and health insurance, and staffing and training issues at New York City's Department of Social Services/Human Resources Administration (HRA).

New York must act to truly earn its reputation of being a safe place for all LGBTQ+ community members. **NYLPI supports several of the items on today's agenda which move our City and State in this direction, including *Int. 0085-2024*, a bill requiring DOHMH and MOIA to develop and issue a health survey for newly arrived migrants, *Int. 0739-2024*, requiring reports on the response to asylum seeker arrivals, and *Int. 0084-2024*, Requiring a survey of newly arrived migrants and asylum seekers to elicit information related to skills, economic opportunities, and workforce development obstacles.** Today, I am here to address why NYLPI stands in support of the aforementioned mentioned bills, and to highlight the immediate need to strengthen New York City's Department of Social Services/Human Resources Administration (HRA) to better meet the needs of Black and LGBTQ+ asylum seekers.

NYLPI Supports Int. Nos. 0085-2024, 0084-2024 and 0739-2024, Which Through Surveying and Data Collection, Can Identify And Help Resolve Inequitable Access to Healthcare, Shelter, Asylum Navigation Services, and Employment for Black and LGBTQ+ Asylum Seekers

Informed by our clients' experiences, NYLPI supports legislation that will identify and track access to healthcare, shelter, and immigration legal support for asylum seeking populations—a crucial first step to ensure that when New York City agencies provide such services, they are doing so in an equitable manner that does not leave Black and LGBTQ+ migrants behind. Half of transgender people and 68% of transgender people of color reported having experienced mistreatment at the hands of medical providers, including refusal of care and verbal or physical abuse in the U.S.⁶ And a survey of LGBTQ+ people in NYC found that 90% of respondents reported feeling unsafe when living in shelter.⁷ Threats of discrimination and harassment unsurprisingly can prevent people from seeking future care, including by postponing or not getting necessary treatment. Our leaders in New York must not allow trends of this type to continue. NYLPI supports Int. Nos. 0085-2024, 0084-2024 and 0739-2024, which will increase transparency in access to healthcare, housing, asylum navigation support, and employment, for LGBTQ+ and Black immigrant populations through reporting and trendspotting, ensuring city agencies are held accountable and can appropriately respond to areas needing improvement.

⁶ Medina, Santos, Mahowald, *Protecting and Advancing Health Care for Transgender Adult Communities*, Center for American Progress (August 18, 2021).

⁷ NYC Comptroller Bureau of Policy and Research, Results of Survey of LGBTQ New Yorkers (June 2017) available at: https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/Results_of_a_Survey_of_LGBTQ.pdf.

I. NYLPI Supports Int. 0739-2024, a Local Law In Relation to the Response To Asylum Seeker Arrivals

NYLPI commends the Council’s commitment to monitoring the outcomes of asylum navigation, housing, and social services provided to asylum seekers living in shelter, as well as agency bidding and vetting processes with contractors providing such services. The City must contract with service providers that are culturally competent to serve Black and LGBTQ+ asylum seeking populations. As of February 2024, over 180,000 asylum seekers have arrived in New York since 2022, and over 65,000 are residing in city shelters.⁸ Many of our new neighbors arrive with significant physical and mental health needs, and all need connection to health insurance and care. We are concerned by reports that health insurance enrollment is inconsistent across the city shelter system. Moreover, the shelter eviction rules have the potential to significantly undermine access to healthcare for this vulnerable population. As a threshold matter, Medicaid enrollment typically takes 45 days. After initial enrollment, enrollees are prompted to provide documentation establishing their eligibility for continued coverage. Coverage may be terminated if they do not respond on time. Individuals forced to leave their shelters risk not receiving these critical notices and losing access to their health insurance as a result. The shelter policies also limit continued access to care: NYLPI encountered one individual living with kidney failure who is successfully enrolled in health insurance. But because of the shelter eviction rules, he lacks a stable address to provide to his medical team, an important factor in the determination of whether or not he will be listed for a kidney transplant. Similar barriers to care are presented for those seeking gender-affirming medical treatment. Repeatedly uprooting individuals connected to vital health services will interfere with their abilities to seek care and have their health needs addressed. This issue is compounded for Black migrants, who already face anti-Black racism in the medical system, leading to inadequate health outcomes.⁹

Furthermore, as previously discussed, when an asylum seeker lacks a stable address, they risk missing crucial communications regarding pending immigration matters. Missing communications from the immigration court can result in a deportation order. Furthermore, uprooting individuals makes it nearly impossible for them to meaningfully participate in their immigration case or obtain legal representation. The City’s recent settlement agreement in *Callahan v. Carey* permits shelter extensions for recent immigrant arrivals with medical conditions, disabilities, upcoming immigration proceedings or appointments, and those engaged

⁸ Janaki Chadha, *Politico*, “New York mayor, Legal Aid, strike deal on ‘right to shelter’ policy for migrants,” March 15, 2024, *available at*: <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/03/15/new-york-mayor-legal-aid-strike-deal-on-right-to-shelter-policy-for-migrants-00147384>; Jennifer Bisram, Ali Bauman, *CBS News*, “More than 7,000 asylum seekers have arrived in New York City in last 2 weeks, mayor’s office says,” Dec. 27, 2023, *available at*: <https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/more-than-7000-asylum-seekers-have-arrived-in-new-york-city-in-last-2-weeks-mayors-office-says/>.

⁹ Nambi Ndugga and Samantha Artiga, KFF “How Recognizing Health Disparities for Black People is Important for Change,” (Feb. 13, 2023) *available at*: <https://www.kff.org/policy-watch/how-recognizing-health-disparities-for-black-people-is-important-for-change/>; see also Amanda Dunker, Elisabeth Ryden Benjamin, Community Service Society, “How Structural Inequalities in New York’s Health Care System Exacerbate Health Disparities During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Call for Equitable Reform,” (June 4, 2020) *available at*: <https://www.cssny.org/news/entry/structural-inequalities-in-new-yorks-health-care-system>.

in a job search. However, this subjective analysis leaves room for bias and discrimination against LGBTQ+ and Black migrants.

To combat these concerns, NYLPI recommends that Int. 0739-2024 implement further data collection measures that can track shelter-extension-grants by race and gender identity. The survey also must be provided with adequate language access and in a manner that ensures Black and LGBTQ+ migrants can participate. Additionally, in the Int.'s "Immigration Application Status Report" section beginning at line 10 of the Bill, NYLPI recommends eliciting responses as to mail returned to an immigration agency sender due to change of resident address. Mail returned to an immigration agency sender means that it is likely that this resident or prior resident has not been notified of a crucial step in their immigration case, such as an upcoming asylum court date. NYLPI has conducted intakes with several recently arrived immigrants who have missed crucial steps in their asylum application process or work permit applications due to being uprooted from shelter. Underlying all of NYLPI's recommendations regarding data collection is the assumption that the City will prioritize confidentiality and will ensure that punitive measures will not be enforced upon any survey respondent.

Finally, the Department of Social Services and MOIA must ensure that employees at asylum navigation centers and shelters receive adequate anti-bias training. As discussed *supra* Black migrants may face increased hurdles in asylum proceedings due to criminalization and prohibitive immigration policies, including safe-third-country policies and the Biden Administration's asylum transit ban. Furthermore, data shows that Black asylum seekers are less likely to be *believed* by immigration adjudicators due to anti-Black bias, resulting in harsh and unjustified heightened evidentiary burdens.¹⁰ Employees at asylum navigation centers must be trained to identify these issues and recognize when a referral to a legal services organization shall be prioritized.

II. NYLPI Supports Int. 0085-2024, A Local Law in Relation to a Health Survey of Newly Arrived Migrants and Asylum Seekers

NYLPI supports the Council's Local Law to anonymously survey newly arrived migrants and asylum seekers to elicit information related to their long-term health needs, chronic conditions, and healthcare service requests. We emphasize the importance of measuring the **outcomes** of whether referrals for healthcare were accepted, and whether needed interventions took place. Additionally, because humanitarian emergency response and relief centers (HERRCs) may be exempt from or waive the minimal health services standards which are otherwise required of shelter facilities under New York State law, we recommend disaggregating data to measure the impact that such waivers have on immigrant health outcomes. Finally, because Black, transgender and gender-nonconforming (TGNC) populations face systemic discrimination in healthcare settings and additional barriers to accessing care, NYLPI urges the Council to adopt questions in the survey that will elicit and assess health outcomes by race and gender identity.

¹⁰ Fatma Marouf, *University of Nevada, Las Vegas, William S. Boyd School of Law*, Implicit Bias and Immigration Courts (2011), available at: <https://scholars.law.unlv.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1809&context=facpub>.

a. *Importance of healthcare for homeless populations*

Healthcare and homelessness are inextricably intertwined. Not only can injury or illness lead to homelessness, but unhoused people experience higher rates of illness and have an average lifespan twelve years shorter than the general United States population.¹¹ For asylum seekers, being unhoused can exacerbate existing health conditions and introduce novel ones.¹² For example, living in a crowded shelter allows communicable diseases to spread more readily, and lack of access to healthy foods, as well as space to rest and recover, can hinder healing.¹³ These reasons alone make the need for access to healthcare evident for all asylum seekers, especially Black and LGBTQ+ migrants who face heightened barriers due to race, xenophobia, transphobia, and homophobia.

b. *The legal responsibility to provide “health services” in shelters*

Under the Official Compilation of Codes, Rules and Regulations of the State of New York (NYCRR), operators of Shelters for Adults and Shelters for Family with Children are “responsible for the development and provision of resident services,” which includes “health services.”¹⁴ The definition of “health services” is largely similar for both types of shelters. Based on 18 NYCRR 491.14(d) and 18 NYCRR 900.14(d), shelters must at minimum provide “an established relationship with a fully accredited medical institution or clinic for the referral of residents for emergency treatment,” and they “must assist residents to access medical services for treatment for injury, illness or disease, or to obtain preventative care.”¹⁵ Further, shelters must offer “a means to safely store and secure prescription medications,” and the statute language provides for courses of action in the case of residents with communicable diseases.¹⁶ Facilities with homeless pregnant people must additionally “demonstrate that prenatal care services are available.”

Private shelters also appear to be held to this standard, but two exclusions remain; one is for Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Centers (HERRCs), operated by New York City agencies such as the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development or the New York City Department of Emergency Management,¹⁷ and the other is for commercial hotels or motels used as temporary placement pursuant to section 352.3(e), which are not used primarily to provide shelter to recipients of temporary housing assistance.¹⁸

Uncertified shelters for unhoused populations, including emergency shelters but not HERRCs, are guided by 18 NYCRR 352.39, which outlines similar requirements for operational

¹¹ *Homelessness & Health: What’s the Connection?*, NAT’L HEALTH CARE FOR THE HOMELESS COUNCIL (Feb. 2019), available at: <https://nhhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/homelessness-and-health.pdf>.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ 18 N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 491, § 14(d); 18 N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 900, § 14(d).

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ E-mail from Cheryl A. Contento, Deputy Comm’r, Off. of Temp. & Disability Assist., to Ann Marie Scalia, Gen. Couns., N.Y.C. Dept. of Soc. Serv. (Aug. 23, 2023), available at: <https://citylimits.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/NYC-Waiver-Request-Response.pdf> [hereinafter E-mail].

¹⁸ 18 N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 352, § 3(e).

plans.¹⁹ Such plans must provide a “plan for health services, including evidence of any arrangement with a fully accredited medical institution or clinic for the referral of resident families for emergency treatment. In addition, if medical supplies are to be stored at the facility or refrigeration is to be provided for personal medical supplies of residents, the arrangements for safekeeping and refrigeration of such medical supplies must be specified.”²⁰ Further, descriptions of community medical health services and procedures for obtaining necessary medical referrals must be made available to residents.²¹

c. *Current trends in “health services” offerings*

Recent reporting on medical health in shelters, as required by local law, helps in further understanding the current landscape of “health services” in the City’s shelters.²² According to the 2021 medical data, 108 of the 399 general shelter programs provided on-site medical health services, while only two of the fifty-five domestic violence shelters and zero of the 122 HIV/AIDS Services Administration (HASA) shelters, geared toward those living with HIV or AIDS, offered such services.²³

The 2023-year review of DHS’ programs and services notes a lack of comprehensive data on the number of clients receiving medical services, as well as the type, quality, and outcomes of those services.²⁴ The only available data are case notes that cannot be aggregated, leading to an inability to understand trends and impacts. The report further states that clients have access to medical services once they are placed through case managers who “assess whether clients have medical needs and provide community referrals, if necessary.”²⁵

This data leaves questions about the regulatory “health services” requirements in practice. It is challenging to understand how the requirements of “an established relationship with a fully accredited medical institution or clinic for the referral of residents for emergency treatment” and the assistance for “residents to access medical services for treatment for injury, illness or disease, or to obtain preventative care” are operationalized. Taken at face value, these requirements set a low bar, which is reinforced by the low numbers of shelter programs providing on-site medical

¹⁹ 18 N.Y. COMP. CODES R. & REGS. tit. 352, § 39.

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ *Id.*

²² N.Y.C. DEPT. OF SOC. SERV. HUM. RES. DEPT. OF HOMELESS SERV., LOCAL LAW 114 2017 REPORT (2017) (available at <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/Local-Law-114-2017-Report.pdf>); N.Y.C. DEPT. OF SOC. SERV. HUM. RES. DEPT. OF HOMELESS SERV., LOCAL LAW 114 2018 REPORT (2018) (available at <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/Local-Law-114-2018-Report.pdf>); N.Y.C. DEPT. OF SOC. SERV. HUM. RES. DEPT. OF HOMELESS SERV., LOCAL LAW 114 2019 REPORT (2019) (available at <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/Local-Law-114-2019-Report.pdf>); N.Y.C. DEPT. OF SOC. SERV. HUM. RES. DEPT. OF HOMELESS SERV., LOCAL LAW 114 2020 REPORT (2020) (available at <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/Local-Law-114-2020-Report.pdf>); N.Y.C. DEPT. OF SOC. SERV. HUM. RES. DEPT. OF HOMELESS SERV., LOCAL LAW 114 2021 REPORT (2021) (available at <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/Local-Law-114-2021-Report.pdf>) [hereinafter Local Law Reports].

²³ Local Law 2021 Report, *supra* at note 22.

²⁴ *See generally, supra* Local Law Reports at note 22.

²⁵ *Id.*

health services and the obscure demand of having a relationship with an emergency healthcare entity and referring clients to medical services if necessary.

d. *Recommendations*

NYC agencies are woefully behind in tracking health data to meet shelter residents' needs and to be held accountable to the standards set by law. This concern is even more dire given the often unique and urgent medical needs of asylum-seeking populations, especially Black and LGBTQ+ asylum seekers who are historically marginalized from health services and have poorer health outcomes due to bias and social determinants of health. As such, it is imperative that the Department of Social Services and MOIA employ more detailed reporting on the individual and program level. Furthermore, we restate the need for language justice in the surveys provided to ensure that Black migrants can participate in their primary language. Such information is critical in understanding the breakdown in asylum seeker healthcare and whether it occurs at intake, around referrals, accessing outside care, or otherwise.

Improving data practices requires time and resources, and as such, other approaches should be employed concurrently. First, the Council should consider amending and clarifying the definition of "health services," broadening and strengthening its significance. Merely requiring a relationship with an emergency health facility and referrals for residents to outside health services is not only a low bar, but also an obscure demand. Changes to the definition should be more prescriptive to ensure asylum-seeking residents have access to the lifesaving resources they need. This could include case manager responsibilities, preventative care expectations, and more.

Further research and outside accountability reviews should be conducted to determine the true landscape and how to best serve asylum seekers in shelter. This should include heightened reporting requirements with an updated 90-day review, as Int. 0085-2024 suggests, as well as a cost analysis of the referral system as compared to preventative care inside or nearby shelters. Finally, different requirements for different types of shelters likely leads to loopholes and imbalances in healthcare access. There should be a unified approach to ensuring that all those facing homelessness – whether newly arriving migrants and asylum seekers or lifelong New Yorkers – receive the care they need.

The City Must Invest More Resources In HRA, Which Lacks Sufficient Capacity and Training to Meet The Needs Of Black and LGBTQIA+ Asylum Seekers

New York City's Local Department of Social Services/Human Resources Administration (HRA) helps more than three million New Yorkers annually through the administration of more than twelve major public assistance programs, including Medicaid for those living with a disability and New York City's HIV/AIDS Services Administration (HASA). This is a significant task, and yet, time and time again, HRA has demonstrated itself ill-prepared to properly administer such programs for immigrant New Yorkers. **HRA's staffing issues and diversion tactics, both of which create barriers to accessing vital services, can be addressed with enhanced training for HRA employees, and increased funding that ensures sufficient staffing.**

Immigrant New Yorkers who are “Permanently Residing Under Color of Law” (“PRUCOL”) may qualify for New York State-funded benefits such as state Medicaid and Safety Net Assistance.²⁶ However, between January 2022 and April 2024 alone, a significant number of transgender and gender-nonconforming asylum seekers that NYLPI represents or has conducted immigration screenings for have encountered wrongful denials of benefits that they already qualify for, including denials of New York State Medicaid, and Public Assistance via HASA—a program which includes rental assistance for people living with HIV.

The laws around public benefits and immigration are highly complex and hard to reconcile, making it difficult for immigrant New Yorkers to understand what benefits they are eligible for and how to obtain them. Exacerbating this issue is the fact that HRA employees reviewing benefits applications may engage in the process of “diversion,” whereby a city employee illegally discourages or deters immigrant New Yorkers from applying, even in ways so subtle as to ask for a green card or social security number when such documents are not required.²⁷ Compounding this issue, transgender and gender-nonconforming asylum seekers may encounter discriminatory diversion tactics from HRA employees who do not follow protocol to ensure a person’s chosen name or correct gender marker are on record with HRA.

Over the last year, NYLPI has taken note of several diversion practices by HRA employees and has advocated for immigrant New Yorkers in these circumstances. Even for asylum seekers who can already demonstrate their PRUCOL eligibility, these diversion practices have included:

1. Requiring that asylum seekers be granted a change of the immigration court’s venue prior to approval of benefits – not a determinant of PRUCOL eligibility;
2. Requesting a social security number – not a determinate of PRUCOL eligibility;
3. Requiring proof that an asylum application has been filed, even where an asylum seeker may already be PRUCOL-eligible via a different immigration status, such as humanitarian parole;
4. Requiring an evaluation and written “PRUCOL letter” from an immigration attorney that states whether the asylum seekers is PRUCOL-eligible, despite clear instructions that the adjudication of benefits must be based on documentation from a federal immigration agency.

Further, in the last two months alone, NYLPI has represented two asylum seekers who, although already able to establish PRUCOL eligibility for HASA rental vouchers, missed multiple opportunities to move from shelter to permanent and independent housing due to slow

²⁶ 18 N.Y.C.R.R. § 360-3.2(j)(ii); § 370.2(c)(6)(vii).

²⁷ See also New York Lawyers for the Public Interest. “FAQ: Health Insurance and Immigration Status,” NYLPI, available at: <https://www.nylpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/FAQ-Health-Insurance-and-Immigration-Status-in-New-York.pdf>.

response times from HASA caseworkers. Missing such opportunities to move from shelter to independent living can cause individuals to be uprooted from one shelter and moved to another, sometimes with less than 24-hours' notice. For one asylum seeker NYLPI represented, this occurred just three days prior to her individual asylum hearing, triggering a panic response and causing her to lose touch with her attorney. Fortunately, in the end, she was granted asylum; but, the Council members can see the traumatic and detrimental impact this can have.

Staffing issues and diversion tactics at HRA are harmful, exacerbate the trauma asylum seekers face, and are contrary to local law. For transgender and gender-nonconforming asylum seekers who may qualify for HASA, wrongful denials of Medicaid and HASA assistance delay crucial gender-affirming care and unnecessarily prolong stays in the shelter system, which although committed to improving, at this time, continues to lack gender-affirming spaces and fails to protect transgender and gender-nonconforming people from hate crimes. The City must ensure that HRA is sufficiently staffed, language access protocols are improved and followed, and that employees are properly trained so that asylum seekers do not continue to experience harmful barriers to accessing healthcare and housing.

Conclusion

Once again, we thank the Committees on Immigration and Hospitals for convening this critical oversight hearing. We appreciate the opportunity to present testimony today on behalf of our clients who are seeking asylum and deserve equitable access to vital services like gender-affirming healthcare, HIV-care, and housing.

We hope the issues we have identified above will help inform the committees' advocacy in the coming months, and we welcome the opportunity to discuss the barriers we have identified and the recommendations we have included in this testimony. Health is a human right.

Arielle Wisbaum, Esq.
Staff Attorney, Health Justice
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
151 West 30th Street, 11th floor
New York, NY 10001
awisbaum@nylpi.org

NYLPI has fought for more than 40 years to protect civil rights and achieve lived equality for communities in need. Led by community priorities, we pursue health, immigrant, disability, and environmental justice. NYLPI combines the power of law, organizing, and the private bar to make lasting change where it's needed most.

NYLPI's Health Justice Program brings a racial equity and immigrant justice focus to health care advocacy, including ongoing work addressing the human rights crisis in immigration detention and advocating for healthcare for all New Yorkers.



Testimony of Public Health Solutions

Before the New York City Council

Committee on Immigration Jointly with the Committee on Hospitals

Oversight – The Experiences of Black Migrants in New York City

T2024-1544

April 16, 2024

My name is Veronica Smith, I am the Senior Director for Health Policy and Community Affairs at Public Health Solutions (PHS). To Committee Chairs Councilmember Aviles, and Councilmember Narcisse, thank you for your time and the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the experiences of Black migrants in New York City (NYC). For more than 60 years, PHS has improved health outcomes and helped communities thrive by providing services directly to vulnerable low-income families, supporting community-based organizations through our long-standing public-private partnerships, and bridging the gap between healthcare and community services. We are a leader in addressing crucial public health issues, including food insecurity and nutrition, health insurance access, maternal and child health, sexual and reproductive health, tobacco control, and HIV/AIDS prevention. Health disparities among New Yorkers are large, persistent and increasing. Public Health Solutions exists to change that trajectory and support underserved New Yorkers and their families in achieving optimal health and building pathways to reach their potential.

In 2022, our Neighborhood Health direct services, provided services to more than 125,000 New Yorkers by increasing access to nutritious food, improving access to healthcare and promoting healthy living. We are proud to be a trusted community resource and would like to share an overview of some of our work below.

Many migrants are seen at NYC Health and Hospitals (H+H) facilities for both medical and social needs. NYC H+H has implemented a facility wide SDOH (social determinants of health) screening and PHS is the contracted community-based organization serving the five boroughs on the receiving end of referrals exclusively for food related needs. Black migrants originate from various regions of the world. Hispanics, including Central and South Americans, such as Venezuelans, Hondurans, Nicaraguans. Africans, the likes of, Senegalese, Gambians, and West Africans who we learn during interactions, previously settled in South American countries such as Brazil and Venezuela. Caribbean migrants including Jamaicans, Guyanese, and Haitians. This set population is often underserved because of invisibility, invisibility can stem from various factors, including social and cultural barriers.

Building Capacity in the Continuum of Services

Leveraging our existing non-profit network in 2018, PHS formed the Food and Nutrition Services (FNS) Bundle, which now resides as a part of a larger network, WholeYouNYC. WholeYouNYC is capable of connecting patients with numerous resources within its vast network. FNS Bundle serves as a means for connecting patients of NYC H+H, with food resources within their communities. We have developed deep lines of trust between patients, and NYC H+H (the largest municipal healthcare system in the United States), where providers are confident their patients will be served with utmost respect, confidentiality, and empathy. At PHS, we understand the uncertainty and unknown of a new city, a new home, the intent of our interactions are hospitable and welcoming. PHS has a wide array of services in conjunction with smaller, familiar



community-based organizations, and faith-based organizations, to support migrants who reside in their communities, and are disconnected from resources.

Access to Food

Black migrants, usually live in close knit communities little Senegal in Harlem, or little Haiti in Brooklyn, even little Guyana in Queens with shared cultural heritage and trusted resources, like a local masjid. Access to religiously appropriate meals are a challenge, many emergency food providers do not distinctly identify as a halal or vegetarian pantry or have capacity to exclusively serve halal appropriate food. Emergency food providers within PHS' WholeYouNYC network try to meet the needs of patients requiring a soup kitchen, and/or prepared meal service, through the FNS Bundle. Some of our Emergency Food providers supply clothing, diapers, household items such as kitchen utensils, pots, pans. Others supply bed linens, towels, bath, and body products, even furniture. Funding for emergency food providers to specifically meet the needs of religiously conscious food, communication in a person's preferred language continues to be a barrier related to access to food. Housing instability, where a person is unable to prepare meals disrupts the feeling of camaraderie within their families. Extensive support for community-based organizations within the communities where black migrants settle can create a sense of belonging and foster trust. For the period of January 2023 through March 2024; 55% of our FNS participants are accepted into food pantries in their communities.

Lack of Language Access

In collaboration with NYC H+H referrals for patients with specific language requests are adequately addressed. During the initial interaction, the patient can request a medical interpreter, and the language preference is communicated with PHS the moment the referral is sent to the FNS Bundle. We also utilize a translation service, specifically targeted to healthcare settings. The interpretation service also serves for voice, video, and mobile capabilities. Patients are often pleased with the translation service, and the window of trust is opened for them to express their needs in ways that are comfortable for them.

Connection to Services

Patients are often on their own to navigate services available to their specific situations. Some cannot understand notices in English, especially immigration, health care related documents, what qualifying services they are eligible for, and generally what is available to them. Black patients are often discriminated against, which can exacerbate existing fears and anxieties, particularly for migrants already marginalized due to their immigration status. Some may believe that it will expose their risk of deportation or separation from their families. To create a space where Black migrants can safely and trustingly connect to resources, PHS intentionally hires staff from their communities. Recognizing, shame, stigma and fear which hamper a migrant family asking for help, PHS' staff is delicately trained to acknowledge some emotional difficulties patients may experience. Hiring a diverse and culturally sensitive team greatly enhances our communication and rapport within the Black migrant community, attuned to their language, culture inclusive of respect for their religion. This leads to more effective service delivery, where cultural understanding is crucial to providing appropriate care. At PHS, our goal is always to maintain the patient's dignity.



###

About Public Health Solutions

Health disparities among New Yorkers are large, persistent and increasing. Public Health Solutions (PHS) exists to change that trajectory and support underserved New Yorkers and their families in achieving optimal health and building pathways to reach their potential. As the largest public health nonprofit serving New York City, we improve health outcomes and help communities thrive by providing services directly to low-income families, supporting community-based organizations through our long-standing public-private partnerships, and bridging the gap between healthcare and community services. We focus on a wide range of public health issues including food and nutrition, health insurance, maternal and child health, sexual and reproductive health, tobacco control, and HIV/AIDS.



TO: Committee on Immigration
FROM: Berta Colón, Executive Director,
DATE: April 18, 2024

Dear Committee on Immigration members,

We appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony on behalf of Riverside Immigrant Services & Empowerment (formerly Riverside Language Program), an immigrant integration center that has been serving newly arrived immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers for over 45 years. Riverside provides a comprehensive set of services and supports to immigrants who have been in the country for less than three years including free, full-time ESL classes, workforce development and digital literacy training, civic and community engagement, and wrap-around case management and counseling.

Immigrants from West African countries currently make up more than a third of our participants. Across the board, newly arrived immigrants face an overwhelming number of obstacles and challenges as they resettle in New York City. However, we are keenly aware of the particular disparities and injustices faced by our African asylum-seeking participants as they attempt to navigate City services. They are facing:

- Verbal and physical abuse due to racism
- Lack of language interpretation and translation
- Disproportionate 30-day City notices to vacate shelter evictions
- Inability to secure work authorization
- A lack of legal services
- A lack of adequate food access and Halal meals
- Inadequate mental and health care

New York City must do better. The disparities in access to services must stop. Language access must be provided. Religious and cultural needs must be respected. Community based organizations filling the gaps in City services must be resourced to provide workforce training and other critical social services.

While some of the necessary changes required to support asylum seekers are outside of the scope of the City's government, it is imperative that the City Council advocate for expedited work authorization and access to legal services and push for Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for West African countries, such as Guinea, Senegal, and Mauritania. Our immigrant communities from those countries share the same struggles and aspirations as other immigrants who have fled similar political and economic



conditions. They, too, should receive the same Temporary Protected Status offered to those groups. A TPS designation could significantly improve their current conditions.

I greatly appreciate the spotlight the Committee on Immigration's is shining on the critical needs of our newly arrived African immigrants and hope that it holds the City accountable for treating all immigrants with the dignity and respect they deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Berta Colón".

Berta Colón
Executive Director

April 16, 2024

New York City Council

Committee on Hospitals
Hon. Mercedes Narcisse, Chair

Committee on Immigration
Hon. Alexa Avilés, Chair

**Testimony of Sebastien Vante, Associate VP of Streetwork Programs, Safe Horizon
The Experiences of Black Migrant Youth in New York City**

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to the Committee on Hospitals and the Committee on Immigration. My name is Sebastien Vante, and I am Associate Vice President of Streetwork Programs at Safe Horizon, the nation's largest non-profit victim services organization. Safe Horizon offers a client-centered, trauma-informed response to 250,000 New Yorkers each year who have experienced violence or abuse. We are increasingly using a lens of racial equity and justice to guide our work with clients, with each other, and in developing the positions we hold.

Safe Horizon's Streetwork Project provides shelter, showers, hot meals, therapy, service linkage, safer sex supports, case management, and so much more, in a therapeutic harm reduction community serving homeless youth ages 13 to 25. We work with homeless and street-involved young people to help them find safety and stability. Many homeless young people face a day-to-day struggle to survive, which can lead to physical and emotional harm. Homeless youth may have experienced family abuse, violence, rejection, and instability that led to their homelessness. We welcome these young people, help them navigate complex systems, and provide essential resources at our drop-in centers, at our overnight shelter, and through our street outreach teams. This work can be incredibly challenging but also rewarding. Streetwork has been doing this community-based work since 1984, and we will continue to do so for as long as our services are needed. In FY23, Streetwork provided services to nearly 1,000 clients across our drop-in centers and overnight shelter, while our overnight street outreach team engaged in over 12,900 contacts with homeless and at-risk young people.

I'm here today to shed light on the plight of a vulnerable population that has been overlooked and underserved: West African unaccompanied youth and minors seeking refuge in our communities. For several months, Streetwork has experienced an influx of these young individuals, many of whom arrive at our doors after being discharged from temporary placements, left adrift and without proper guidance. These youth, fleeing persecution, violence, forced marriage, and female genital mutilation (FGM), seek safety, community, and humanity in our programs. Despite our best efforts, we operate under-resourced and underfunded. Still, we remain steadfast in our commitment to meet their needs.

As a provider, it pains me to witness these youth being ushered through a system that fails to address their unique challenges and aspirations adequately. Many of our staff share similar identities and histories with the youth we serve, which imbues our work with a profound sense of empathy and understanding. However, the current system, characterized by bureaucratic hurdles and systemic indifference, fails to honor their humanity and the struggles of their journey.

Recent reports have highlighted the shortcomings in our city's response to the educational needs of immigrant youth. Despite federal laws mandating their enrollment in public schools, we are witnessing egregious delays and obstacles hindering their access to education. The New York City Public Schools' failure to track enrollment referrals and reluctance to provide timely and appropriate educational opportunities to these youth are deeply concerning.

What should be a straightforward enrollment process has become a cumbersome ordeal, often lasting several weeks to over a month. Seat availability, school type, student needs, and timing within the academic year contribute to this delay.

One major obstacle is the lack of space in GED programs or alternative high school options. This scarcity makes securing placements for immigrant students exceedingly difficult. Prolonged delays negatively impact our youth's mental well-being as they feel increasingly isolated from their peers attending school.

This systemic failure is compounded by the challenges faced by immigrant youths in accessing stable housing and essential services. The recent legal settlement regarding shelter rules, while a step in the right direction for people under 23 who now may qualify for an initial 60-day stay, still leaves many vulnerable individuals without adequate support and resources. The plight of individuals who lose their jobs due to the arduous reapplication process for shelter underscores the urgent need for comprehensive reforms.

We must hold the City to account for the systemic failures that marginalize immigrant youth. We demand transparency, accountability, and meaningful reforms to ensure every child and young person has access to the resources and opportunities they need to thrive, regardless of their background or circumstances.

I urge this committee to take decisive action to address the systemic failures in our city's response to the needs of immigrant youth. We owe it to them to provide a pathway to safety, stability, and opportunity, and it is our collective responsibility to ensure that no young person is left behind and ignored.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.



**ST. MARK'S
CHURCH**
IN-THE-BOWERY

To: Committee on Immigration

FROM: The Rev. Anne Marie Witchger and the community of St. Mark's Church
in-the-Bowery, April 16th 2024

Dear Committee on Immigration,

We are grateful for the opportunity to share written testimony on behalf of St. Mark's Church in-the-Bowery. St. Mark's has a nearly 400 year history in lower Manhattan and for the last several decades has been a leader in the arts, community engagement, social concern, and direct service in the East Village and Lower East Side.

St. Mark's Church currently operates a Welcome/Warming Center for those seeking asylum on Wednesday afternoons to provide resources and support. We serve 50-100 asylum seekers, mostly from West Africa, each week.

We are deeply concerned by the disparities faced by African asylum seekers as they attempt to navigate the resources provided by the City. Our experience has been that African asylum seekers face increased barriers due to language and translation needs, special needs related to religious traditions, and are finding it more difficult to navigate work possibilities and shelter options due to the 30-day notice policy. Folks also struggle to submit their asylum applications, receive healthcare, and enroll in language learning opportunities. We are especially concerned about the barriers facing youth asylum seekers and hope there can be pathways for greater support.

Thank you so much committee, for convening us to learn more about the experience of West African asylum seekers in our City. We hope that some of the following experiences might help push the City's response to be more welcoming.

During Ramadan, we provided to-go meals for the asylum seekers visiting our Center. We heard over and over again about the barriers in the shelters to being able to eat and pray and the appropriate times. We've heard about unsafe and inhumane conditions in the shelter system.

The men and youth we serve have described extreme mental health episodes involving other shelter residents, and an overall lack of safety and cleanliness in the system. We have also heard of serious health and safety issues, such as the prevalence of Tuberculosis and other communicable diseases in the shelters. At the same time, folks are afraid to sleep on the street or in a mosque because they may lose the opportunity to be assigned to a new shelter.

As a faith community, we have a wonderful network of volunteers and community resources. We believe that we have a unique opportunity to help folks find community and connection in our city, but our hands are tied. We cannot make work connections for these men because they do not have working documents and we cannot find permanent housing options because they do not have steady income sources. We don't see an end to this crisis if the folks living in our city cannot work or begin to pay for their own food and housing.

We urge the city council to demand expedited work authorization for asylum seekers and simultaneously to push for Temporary Protected Status for West African countries, such as Guinea, Senegal, and Mauritania.

As a city, we need to be creative and flexible in addressing this crisis and be open to new possibilities, even as we wait for Federal policies to change. Those arriving in our city have proven to be hard working and incredibly resourceful. We cannot let them languish here; we have a moral obligation to offer the care and support that we can.

In the weeks and months ahead, we hope we can see:

- Increased Language Access for every City resource
- Greater access to Workforce Development in Afro-indigenous languages
- Eliminating the 30-Day Shelter Limit for asylum seekers
- Federal Advocacy for work authorization and Temporary Protected Status
- In the face of federal inaction, find creative ways within the City of hiring people who are waiting for work authorization, including helping asylum seekers find safe ways to integrate into the many cash economies in New York and find community-based housing options.

Thank you for your attention to these issues.

Sincerely,

The Rev. Anne Marie Witchger

Priest-in-Charge at St. Mark's Church in-the Bowery, 131 E. 10th Street New York, NY



ICNY
Interfaith Center of New York

TO: Committee on Immigration

FROM: The Rev. Chloe Breyer and Brennan Brink, The Interfaith Center of New York, April 16, 2024

Dear Committee on Immigration,

We are grateful for this opportunity to provide you with written testimony on behalf of The Interfaith Center of New York, a non-profit organization which, over the course of 25 years, has built the most religiously-diverse and civically-engaged network of grassroots and immigrant religious leaders across the five boroughs of Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, Staten Island and The Bronx. One of our current initiatives is a coalition of faith leaders who work tirelessly to provide a dignity filled welcome to New York to the newest arriving asylum seekers.

The Interfaith Center of New York is deeply concerned by the disparities faced by African asylum seekers as they attempt to navigate the resources provided by the City. From issues with language access, lack of workforce development, and evictions due to the City's 30-Day notice policy, we've seen how asylum seekers from West Africa face disproportionate barriers to resettling in our City. Thank you so much committee, for convening us to learn more about the experience of West African asylum seekers in our City. We hope that some of the following experiences might help push the City's response to be more welcoming.

The Interfaith Center of New York has witnessed first-hand the burden placed on the faith community. During Ramadan, ICNY partnered with the Gambian Youth Organization, Afrikana, and Bridging Cultures Group, to provide thousands of Halal meals at mosques for Iftar and Suhur. Here we met with Imams welcoming anywhere from one to four hundred asylum seekers – many of whom were dealing with immense food insecurity – to break their fast together. This work does not end with Ramadan. These faith communities

continue to step up to receive mail on behalf of asylum seekers, facilitate resettlement into apartments, and connect asylum seekers to key resources like ESL.

We also recognize the role of religious diversity as a key to understanding the asylum seeker crisis. Many of the asylum seekers from West Africa are Muslims and need access to better halal food in their shelters. But many are Christians, fleeing religious persecution in their home country. Since traders arrived in New York, it has been a sanctuary for religious diversity, and it is our moral duty to ensure those arriving in New York can settle safely and express their religion freely.

It is important to note that some of the support asylum seekers need is outside of the scope of New York City's government. Asylum seekers face unnecessarily long waits after having made arduous journeys away from dire humanitarian situations. We urge the city council to be fierce advocates for expedited work authorization for asylum seekers and simultaneously to push for Temporary Protected Status for West African countries, such as Guinea, Senegal, and Mauritania. Following the TPS designation for Venezuela, the City, State, and Federal government launched a remarkably effective site to help every eligible person to sign-up – the same model for West African asylum seekers would drastically improve the conditions within the City. As we await such federal designations, we ask that the City find ways to hire people who are waiting for work authorization.

Thank you, committee on immigration, for convening this meeting to hear about the conditions of West African asylum seekers in our city. We hope that it will help the City Council to steer the budget to reflect an equitable response to the Asylum Seeker crisis. As we've outlined above, some components of that response are:

- Increased Language Access for every City resource
- Greater access to Workforce Development in Afro-indigenous languages
- Eliminating the 30-Day Shelter Limit for asylum seekers
- Federal Advocacy for work authorization and Temporary Protected Status
- In the face of federal inaction, find creative ways within the City of hiring people who are waiting for work authorization

Sincerely,

The Rev. Chloe Breyer, Executive Director

Brennan Brink, Migrant Shelter and Immigration Consultant

The Interfaith Center of New York

**TESTIMONY BEFORE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL'S
COMMITTEES ON IMMIGRATION AND HOSPITALS**

THE EXPERIENCE OF BLACK MIGRANTS

Hearing Date: April 16, 2024

My name is Deborah Lee, and I am the Attorney-in-Charge of the Immigration Law Unit (ILU) at The Legal Aid Society (LAS). For over 145 years, LAS has been a tireless advocate for those least able to advocate for themselves. ILU, founded in the 1980s, provides legal representation to vulnerable New Yorkers seeking relief for themselves and their families. We assist those in detention and fighting unlawful deportations and represent low-income individuals in gaining and maintaining lawful status. Combining this representation with affirmative litigation work, we strive to ensure that families are able to stay together and stabilize their living situations. Over the most recent year, ILU assisted in over 7,500 individual legal matters benefiting over 18,500 New Yorkers citywide.

LAS submits our written testimony alongside the oral and written testimony of our client, Abdalmajeed Ishag.

LAS is concerned that Black migrants face repeated and disproportionate challenges at the border but also when they are here in New York City. Systemic racism in the United States reinforces disenfranchisement at each and every step of these migrants' life in this country.

We will first address our concerns generally for Black migrants in New York City, and then the proposed local laws being considered here.

Federal immigration officials often exclude Black migrants – and specifically single Black men - from humanitarian parole options that other recent migrants are granted in much larger numbers. Without humanitarian parole, these Black migrants are often only able to apply for a work permit after

Justice in Every Borough.

submitting their asylum application and then accrue 150 days on their “asylum clock.” Given the lack of capacity amongst immigration legal service providers in New York City to provide legal representation to these asylum seekers, let alone even helping to complete asylum applications in a less than ideal pro se model, many of these Black migrants will not receive help with the first step of completing an asylum application. Without dedicated funding for reputable immigration service providers to help with these long-term Immigration Court cases, Black migrants will likely not apply for asylum timely, have any kind of assistance through their immigration case, or have the ability to apply for a temporary work permit based on their pending asylum application. They will then become a part of this City’s underclass of undocumented individuals, who are vulnerable to exploitation on numerous fronts.

In shelter here, many Black migrants have had difficulties communicating with shelter staff. While shelter staff might be able to utilize a telephonic interpreter service, this does not occur in practice all the time and often non-English and non-Spanish speaking Black migrants are left without the ability to communicate effectively. In his oral and written testimony, LAS client Abdalmajeed Ishag notes how he repeatedly feels unable to communicate with shelter staff. Over the past year, and during his stay in 5 different shelters, Mr. Ishag has only encountered one shelter staff worker who spoke Arabic. Mr. Ishag’s experience is not unique, sadly. Shelter residents and former shelter residents have repeatedly noted the lack of equitable language access.

There is a significant lack of resources citywide that are dedicated to helping non-English and non-Spanish speaking Black migrants. Regarding resources about immigration legal systems and options, Spanish is the dominant language utilized. We call upon the City develop many more written but also short-form video resources in French, Haitian-Creole, Fulani, Arabic, and Wolof. In particular, LAS urges the City to provide targeted resources to non-English and non-Spanish speaking recent migrants regarding immigration fraud and scams in the immigration legal context.

Without being able to communicate or understand immigration systems directly, non-English and non-Spanish speaking Black migrants are also at risk of exploitation in the work front. Given the above mentioned language access barriers, these migrants do not know what recourse they have if their employer fails to pay them a lawful wage, fails to pay them, or harms them in other ways. By partnering with trusted community-based organizations and religious groups, the City must proactively provide information Black migrants about their rights as workers

LAS is also concerned about how the City has addressed Black migrant youth in the adult shelter system and who have been identified as being under 18 years of age. The City and our Administration for Children's Services have a legal obligation to remove them from the adult shelter system. While ACS intervention is not ideal, it is for many of these unaccompanied youth, as it provides Family Court jurisdiction and a pathway to Special Immigrant Juvenile status (SIJS). As City Council is well aware, one must apply for SIJS before one's 21st birthday or lose out entirely on this immigration benefit. LAS is deeply worried that many youth between the ages of 18 and 21 years of age or at serious risk of forever ageing out of eligibility for SIJS.

Regarding Int. 0085-2024:

- *In relation to a survey of newly arrived migrants and asylum seekers, and to repeal such amendments upon the expiration thereof*

Generally, LAS agrees it might be helpful to have the City survey newly arrived migrants and asylum seekers to elicit information related to skills, economic opportunities, and workforce development obstacles, as anticipated by the bill. However, given our experiences with existing city agencies, LAS believes this survey would be better developed as a partnership between the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development or the Small Business Services office.

- *In relation to a health survey of newly arrived migrants and asylum seekers, and to repeal such amendments upon the expiration thereof*

We applaud the Council for introducing Int 0085-2024 which would require an annual survey of the health needs of newly arrived migrants and asylum seekers. Many migrants, including those who have filed applications for asylum, are eligible for full Medicaid coverage in New York, but migrants may experience numerous barriers to accessing coverage and care. Given that the Medicaid program is administered by the State Department of Health, the survey should be designed to most effectively capture information that can help the Council influence state policy to expand access to coverage and care for immigrants. For example, the survey should elicit information from individuals who have not yet filed an asylum or other application and are only eligible for Emergency Medicaid about their barriers accessing health care. This could be used for advocacy with the state to pass Coverage for All, which would expand public health insurance to low-income New Yorkers regardless of immigration status using federal dollars. This information could also inform decisions about how the Council can better promote and support NYC Care, which provides access to primary care and other health services for undocumented individuals in New York City.

Another objective of the survey as described in Int 0085-2024 is to gather information about healthcare services requests from migrants and asylum seekers. LAS represents many Medicaid recipients who are denied medically necessary services and care by Medicaid managed care plans. The State Department of Health is required to oversee Medicaid managed care plans, but effective oversight is often lacking. Even when some Medicaid recipients win appeals and hearings to secure care they need, the plans benefit financially from delaying and denying care, knowing many people never appeal. Surveying this population regarding the difficulty accessing care, even for those who are covered by Medicaid, could inform advocacy with the state for improved oversight of plans.

Regarding Int. 0739-2024 (to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to reports on the response to asylum seeker arrivals and requiring the use of budget codes for funding associated with the response to asylum seeker arrivals):

Justice in Every Borough.

LAS is supportive of this effort to increase transparency and accountability related to the City's response to recent migrants.

Regarding Res. 0340-2024 (calling on the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to eliminate filing fees for humanitarian benefit applications and subsequent employment authorization applications and calling on Congress and the President to move significant funding to USCIS to cover the funding lost by the eliminated filing fees):

LAS is also supportive of this effort to increase the accessibility of humanitarian benefit applications, including for related waiver applications, biometrics processing fees, and subsequent employment authorization applications.

In conclusion, we thank the City Council for having this hearing and attempting to rectify the challenges faced by Black migrants in this country and in our City.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Deborah Lee", is enclosed in a rectangular box.

Deborah Lee
Attorney-in-Charge
Immigration Law Unit
The Legal Aid Society



Free to
Be Youth
Project

Free to Be Youth Project

40 Rector St.
9th Floor
New York, NY 10006

Twitter:
@YouthprojectUJC

Instagram:
@freetobeyouthproject

TikTok:
@freetobeyouthproject

Testimony of Connie Ticho
Legal Intern at the Free to Be Youth Project
Urban Justice Center

Oversight: The Experiences of Black Migrants in New York City

New York City Council Committee on Immigration
Hon. Alexa Avilés, Chair

New York City Council Committee on Hospitals
Hon. Mercedes Narcisse, Chair

April 16, 2024

Introduction

Good morning. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak with you today. On behalf of the Free to Be Youth Project (formerly the Peter Cicchino Youth Project) of the Urban Justice Center, I'd like to thank the New York City Council's Committee on Immigration and the Committee on Hospitals for convening this hearing. My name is Connie Ticho and I am a legal intern at the Free to Be Youth Project of the Urban Justice Center.

Free to Be Youth is dedicated to serving homeless and at-risk lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) youth. We provide free legal services for individual LGBTQ+ young people up to the age of 24 and systemic advocacy for the LGBTQ+ youth community. The Project is housed at the Urban Justice Center, a non-profit law collective serving New York City's most disenfranchised poverty populations. Since 1994, we have been providing legal services to LGBTQ+ youth and young adults who are poor, living on the streets, in homeless shelters, in the juvenile justice system or in foster care. We regularly travel to drop-in centers where homeless youth congregate to offer our services. Our project has helped hundreds of LGBTQ+ youth with legal problems like applying for legal immigration status, fighting wrongful denials of disability benefits, changing their names, fighting terminations of their public assistance benefits, overcoming barriers to obtaining safe and stable housing, and being wrongly turned away from our City's homeless shelters.

Background

When Mayor Adams took office in January 2022 there was already a long-established crisis of homelessness in New York City. The majority of homeless individuals and families resided in the main municipal shelter system, run by the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), with many thousands of others scattered across four other municipal shelter systems, including runaway and homeless youth in the youth-specific system administered by the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD).

In the Spring of 2022, an increasing number of migrant individuals and families began to arrive from the southern border and elsewhere. By fall of 2022, the Adams administration had announced the creation of Humanitarian Emergency Relief and Response Center's (HERRC's), with the clear intent to circumvent the right to shelter guaranteed to class members of the [Callahan litigation](#) overseen by the Legal Aid Society and Coalition for the Homeless.

Indeed, from early on in his administration the Mayor [called for, and imposed](#), a separate shelter system for migrants, particularly single migrants. This separate shelter system was increasingly haphazard, with the Mayor, at points, deliberating the merits of placing individuals and families on cruise ships, and then opening massive tent structures on Randall's Island as well as on Floyd Bennet Field in Brooklyn. Rhetorically, the Mayor focused on the special needs of so-called "new arrivals" to justify the new shelter system, while simultaneously creating a system clearly intended to send a deterrence message for people considering coming to New York City. Black and African migrants – systematically disadvantaged across their migration – [faced particularly difficult circumstances](#).

As the crisis intensified, the Mayor increasingly turned to punitive and dramatic tactics, both rhetorically and materially, to both deter additional migrants and make already-present migrants feel uncomfortable and unsupported. The pinnacle of this was an unnecessary stunt – unnecessary because there were alternative resources the City could have used – whereby individuals awaiting placement at the Roosevelt Hotel intake center [were made to sleep on red hot concrete sidewalks](#) for nights in August of last year. For individuals witnessing this in-person or via pictures or footage, it was also clear that many of those left outside were Black individuals, often coming to the U.S. as refugees from nations in Africa. There is good reason to believe that part of the intent of this stunt, like the haphazard nature of the HERRC's, was to send a deterrence message to individuals fleeing other nations and migrations, and making their way or arriving in NYC, to the United States.

Queer youth that have recently migrated here have faced additional barriers to accessing safe shelter. In some cases, for example, HERRC's have been unsafe for them as they face the same kinds of discrimination and violence in these shelters as faced in the places, they left. There are no LGBTQ+ specific HERRC beds, and a scarcity of youth beds in general (addressed below). While DHS has agreed, as exceptions, to take some young queer migrants into safer, queer-specific DHS beds, this is an exception and not a rule and requires access to skilled advocacy, which most people, let alone recent migrants with limited English or understanding of the shelter rules are, do not have. As a result, some highly vulnerable migrant youths have ended up in dangerous situations in trying to survive the City's decision to both systematically turn them away from DHS beds and the dangers of the HERRC system.

Historically, many young Runaway Homeless Youth have relied on the youth-specific shelter system to help stay off the streets. However, there is no right-to-shelter for youth in New York City under 21 within the youth-specific shelter (DYCD) system, and very few beds for young adults from 21-24 years old. Eligibility for most youth beds ends upon an individual's twenty-first birthday. However, even for many young people under 21 there is often not an available bed, as there are only [753 residential beds](#) available for young adults under 21 years old, and only [60 beds for young adults between 21 and 24 years old](#). Since the mass waves of migration began in 2022, the RHY system has faced far greater need than it can adequately support, and the City has not adjusted its resources to support the growing homeless youth population, including migrants and refugees who face a myriad of risks that come with being young and street-homeless in New York City.

The share of individuals and families seeking asylum who are migrating from African nations has [increased](#) from three-percent in FY21 to twenty-four percent in FY24. As the main municipal shelters have seen increases in migrants from west African nations, our office has also seen an increase in homeless youth in need of assistance [from nations](#) that include Guinea, Senegal, and Mauritania. The growth of homeless youth within the RHY age-range of 16-25 has been significant across New York City, [with a 75% increase in this population](#) between 2022 and 2023. In fact, according to the most recent federal assessment of homelessness nationwide, New York City continues to have the [largest homeless youth population](#) of anywhere in the United States.

Current Issues

Black migrants in New York City face a number of extreme hurdles that make settling here particularly difficult. We discuss these below.

Language access: Many of the migrants who come to New York City speak African dialects or French; many service providers do not have fluent speakers on site, and this can create significant gaps in service or support. For languages that are less commonly spoken in the United States, even access to remote translation through services like Language Line can often require extensive waits, and sometimes it is not possible to obtain remote translation services. As a result, these young people face unique barriers that could be resolved with increased resources.

Food access: Access to meals is limited for many migrants due to poverty, and they are nearly universally ineligible for SNAP (food stamps) due to restrictive federal rules. While RHY programs have done their best to assist youth with culturally appropriate meals, we continue to meet migrant young people who suffer from hunger. As has been [well documented](#), there is a correlation between young people's engagement in the street economy and survival work with a lack of access to food.

Shelter and housing support: Many migrants youth have had an extremely difficult time accessing stable and safe shelter, and for homeless youth and young adults this is exacerbated by the sharp age cutoffs in the system. Someone who is 20 years old one day, but turns 21 the next, loses access to RHY-specific shelters in just a day. For queer homeless youth who are migrating from oftentimes very dangerous situations, there is a deep need for resources that are made specifically safe and competent to serve them. Like the general DHS system, the HERRC system often presents specific dangers to LGBTQ+ young people.

The Recent Shelter Settlement: The [recent settlement](#) that removes access to DHS shelters for individuals who arrived in the U.S. after March 15, 2022, also creates severe time-limits on shelter access. For youth under 23 years old, they will be limited to a 60-day stay; for young adults 23 or over, they will be limited to a 30-day stay. Extensions will ultimately be subject to the discretion of City bureaucrats. By enforcing the limit on the right to shelter, City officials will be putting homeless youth in very serious danger. For queer and BIPOC youth, the risks are particularly high. Young people are at [increased risk for individualized violence](#), targeting by [police for survival](#) crimes, [sweeps](#) by municipal agencies, and [sex trafficking](#).

Legal support: The dearth of legal advocacy available to homeless youth in general is severe, and the need has grown persistently in recent years. Our program, for example, is the one of the main LGBTQ+-specific legal service providers for homeless young people in New York City. We have only a few staff members and cannot meet anywhere near the needs of the population we exist to serve. Additionally, DYCD programs are still without the ability to directly refer individuals applying for asylum to [the Asylum Application Help Center](#), keeping from many young people and service providers a key resource.

What City Government Can Do

It is important to recall that New York City is the wealthiest city in the world. Nearly 150,000 homeless people are sheltered in a shadow of almost unfathomable wealth (in addition to the many thousands of others who live in other types of homelessness, like hyper-precarious overcrowding and doubled-up situations). So, while it is the case that the growth of the homeless population comes with a price tag, the argument that the city cannot adequately fund shelter and other services is really a political and moral argument about how public expenditures should be made.

Shelter and Housing: Perhaps most importantly for homeless young adults, the City can begin to actually fund youth-specific shelter beds for young adults 21-24 years old, in line with the actual need. While we support a right to youth-specific shelter, in the absence of that the City must actually make sure young adults are able to access appropriate resources, most importantly a safe and affirming place to sleep at night.

The City must also begin providing housing resources to homeless youth, including migrant homeless young people. For years, the City has simply refused to provide homeless youth access to CityFHEPS rental subsidies. Despite the City's legal obligation to provide youth relying on DYCD resources access to these rental subsidies, the administration has not budged. As a result, young people stay homeless longer and end up in dangerous situations they never should've been pushed toward, because they lack consistently safe places to sleep at night.

For disabled young adults applying for supportive housing who receive Safety Net Assistance (SNA) and who are therefore considered to be a Person Residing Under the Color of Law (PRUCOL), there is a need to educate supportive housing providers on eligibility criteria. In fact, as part of the SNA cash grant, these young people have the ability to pay rent in subsidized housing. Contrary to a popular myth, many of these young people are eligible for subsidized supportive housing as long as it does not have a federal Section 8 subsidy attached to it.

Language Access: The City must provide sufficient funding for every RHY program to have access to sufficient translation services for all languages, and particularly the African dialects that are less commonly spoken in United States.

Food Access: The City must attend to the fact that hunger amongst homeless youth carries life-endangering risks for them. For the young people who are not eligible for SNAP due to restrictive federal rules, the City must create alternative support to ensure that no young person wants for culturally appropriate, nutritious food.

Legal Support: The dearth of legal services for individuals who have recently migrated to the U.S is severe and hits homeless youth particularly hard. We fully support the recommendations made by the Coalition for Homeless Youth, including:

- The City must immediately allow DYCD programs the ability to directly refer to the Asylum Application Help Center(s).
- Municipal legal services must be expanded to include full representation lawyers that specifically support youth in applying for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) applications.

- The Administration for Children's Services needs to coordinate further with DYCD to support the immediate transition of services for "Destitute Minor," in a way that respects youth choice and complies with the law.
- The City needs to strengthen their relationship with Foreign Consulates to ensure that Black migrants have access to supports to obtain lost or inaccurate vital documents.

Thank you for your time today, I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

**TESTIMONY BEFORE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL'S
COMMITTEES ON IMMIGRATION AND HOSPITALS**

Presented on April 16, 2024

My name is Abdulmajeed Yahya Harun Ishag.

I am 32 years old and I was born in Sudan.

I came to the United States in April of 2023. I came to New York City at the beginning of June of 2023.

I am living in a shelter in Brooklyn.

I want to tell you about my experiences living in a shelter here in New York City.

I came to the United States because I was not safe in my country of Sudan and could not stay there. I am here by myself.

It is hard to live in a shelter in New York City. Every month they transfer me to another shelter. It takes about 10 days for them to find another shelter for me. I worry that I will end up in a shelter that will be dangerous. I have heard that shelter will only be guaranteed for married couples with children but I do not know this if this is true. I have been in 5 shelters in New York City. The longest time I stayed in a shelter was in Astoria for 2 months.

In my experience, some of the shelter staff are biased towards Latin people. They might get more food. They can speak Spanish and can communicate with the other shelter residents who speak Spanish. I have often felt like they prefer the other Latin shelter residents and I do not always feel welcome. I have only seen one other Arabic-speaking shelter worker during my time in New York City, when I was at Randall's Island.

I have also had medical issues and it has not been treated. I have had stomach pains and avoid certain kinds of food, including foods that are spicy or very cold. I told the shelter workers but do not think they really cared. They told me to go to the emergency room but this did not help.

I was able to find a place called NYC Common Pantry, which is a place to get food and they also have a medical clinic. But I had to find this place myself.

I want to improve myself and have been going to English language classes. But sometimes going to school is very hard. Sometimes it takes me 2 hours to travel to English language classes or vocational classes. And the shelter will only help me with a MetroCard for an immigration appointment or a doctor's appointment. They don't give me a MetroCard for my English classes to improve myself. Sometimes when I do not have a MetroCard for the bus the bus driver tries to embarrass me or make me think he is making fun of me in front of all the other passengers.

Other people in shelter that I know are being offered jobs for little pay. These are in smaller shops or supermarkets. They work 10 hours a day, 6 or 7 days a week, and maybe get \$1000 or

1500 for the whole month. These other immigrants are desperate for any work. Sometimes people will not give the immigrant what they are owed and are told that they will be paid in the future, but then they do not get paid fully. This happened to other black migrants that I know.

Getting legal services has also been hard. I have not met an immigration attorney who speaks Arabic or Aranga, my primary language. I do have an attorney though now and she has been helping me.

I had big hopes coming to the United States but still feel very unsettled. I want to continue my studies in economics and be a part of the community.

Thank you for this opportunity.

Respectfully submitted,


Abdalmajeed Ishag (Apr 18, 2024 09:49 EDT)

Abdalmajeed Ishag
abdalmagedyahia882@gmail.com

Hi, my name is Aisha Farooq, I'm 16
and I go to a public high school in New York.
I believe that it is very important that we
help the migrants coming into this
country to seek asylum because the situation
in their home countries is really bad and that's
why they are willing to leave their home & families
to come to America. We have a responsibility
to help these people & provide them with the
resources & opportunities to make a difference
for their families. If we didn't have enough
I would understand not helping them,
but we are fully capable of providing aid
to these people & it would be selfish of
us not to.

To the City Council,

My name is Anna Tsomo and I'm an educator at Sixth Street Community Center in the Lower East Side. For several months, I have been on the ground providing aid for asylum seekers waiting in line at St Brigid's reticketing center, alongside community members and my own high school students. I noticed immediately when the reticketing center was moved two blocks from our community center that people were in deep need of support, and that our city has failed to provide it.

It has been truly heartbreaking to see the hundreds of people waiting in line for a chance to be placed in temporary shelters...people shivering in t-shirts in 26 degree weather, people walking away hungry when the soup kitchen runs out of meals. People who had risked everything to arrive here, only to be treated with carelessness and xenophobia. As City Council, I am asking you to pass the three pieces of legislation that would help gather data on the true needs of asylum seekers in our city - Intro 0084-2024, Intro 0085-2025, and T2024-093.

But beyond that, I urge you with most urgency to fund our social programs, provide more case workers, and to fund mutual aid collectives and nonprofits that have been filling the vast gaps in Government aid. End the Mayor's state of emergency, which allows for evictions after 30 days in shelters, and allows private contractors to run our aid systems with no oversight or regulation - essentially profiting off the suffering of our most vulnerable New Yorkers.

I am writing to you as a descendant of refugees myself. Please, members of the city council, do everything in your power to give asylum seekers the support they deserve, in the darkest moment of their lives, fight for human dignity for all.

Testimony:

My name is Ashley. I'm 16 years old and I declare health needs and healthcare to asylum seekers. They need help after all the trauma they have faced arriving in the U.S. Also I declare that all childrens and teens enrolled in school should be prioritized and not neglected, they shouldn't be treated wrongly just because they don't speak the language. They are humans like you and me, not animals.

my name is Avril Fernandez, I am 16 year olds
and live in Brooklyn. I am writing to urge you
to Pass Intro 0084-2024, intro 0085-2024, and
T 2024-0037. I personally believe that NYC
needs to strongly support migrants and asylum
seekers because everyone, regardless of their situation
deserve to get as many opportunities as they
may receive. These people are coming here to
experience safety and better living conditions
and so it is very crucial to give them the
resources they need to survive and make
their journey and all their hard work
worthy. Remember that America
isn't really great when its cities aren't
contributing to those in need. Therefore,
Please consider these people and
help out as much as you can ^{the} asylum
seekers and immigrants. I have personally
see the desperation and need that people
at a near asylum from 6th street, the
program I go to, have for food, clothes, and
shelters. It's time to 100% give back
to those in need.

Thank you so much,
Avril E.

Hello, my name is Candace Gottschalk. I am a community member part of Brooklyn and I am part an incredible mutual aid network in New York that has filled the holes of direct services and emergency needs through grassroots mobilization.

We are here today to speak about the lack of holistic social services and case management afforded Black asylum seeker migrants - specifically those from the continent of Africa and Haiti “ in a moment where our new brothers and sisters are escaping the ruins of colonialism, civil war, and capitalist extraction. They are here to seek a better livelihood, but also to save their life. It is common knowledge that the majority of Black asylum seekers have yet to be able to secure legal representation and process their asylum paperwork. Every day, the number of those who have missed their deadline to apply for asylum increases. Many are at a standstill, unemployed and are facing houselessness, we demand for the city stop neglecting Black migrants.

1. We demand for the city to hold itself and CBO’s (Community Based Organizations) accountable to Black migrant asylum seekers. Every CBO or New York Immigration council satellite site that has been allocated funding to assist asylum seekers should receive and provide case management to everyone, including Black African and Afro Caribbean migrants.
2. We demand the city stop allocating state and federal funding meant for asylum seeker services to private corporations. Over 500 million dollars was made available for this manufactured crisis by the city and asylum seekers are in a worse condition than 2022. That funding should be used to increase city employment. This would increase the number of social workers, expand housing services, and invest in public education workers to meet the current needs of all New Yorkers including our new Black migrant community.
3. We demand for the city to provide city materials in languages accessible to the new African migrant community. City notices and CBO workforce development programs, like OSHA or even ESL classes, are not provided in languages that are understood by our newcomers. This limit is xenophobic and racist. Our new Black migrant community members are not a monolith and do not share a single story. Every asylum seeker’ needs must be individualized, respected and considered with care.
4. We demand holistic case management- including support, processing and filing I-589s, access to health care, expedited residency status at shelter sites, access to IDNYC without appointments and guaranteed access to livable shelter.
5. We demand for the city to financially support Black led; Black immigrant grassroots organizations that have been proven to offer efficient case management to asylum seekers only. We demand for the city to encourage and support more African service organizations to work in Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island. Every respite center and family shelter should be assigned to a community-centered grassroots organization that can offer culturally specific human centered case management for all asylum seekers- including Black African and Afro-Caribbean migrants.

Thank you, Candace Gottschalk

CIANA

The Center for the Integration
and Advancement of New
Americans

FOR THE RECORD

- We provide legal and Case Management
- Resources for Asylum Seekers in French, Arabic Spanish: Fair Fares (reduced Metrocard, IDNYC application NYC Care

!!!

Please Contact: Emilia@ciainc.org
Joel@ciainc.org
Amarly Curado (718) 545-4090

FOR THE RECORD



Taller De Licencias & Regulaciones



**¿CÓMO OBTENER UNA
LICENCIA DE
CICLOMOTOR,
MOTOCICLETA O
VEHÍCULO?**

**¿QUÉ HACER SI TE
CONFISCAN LA MOTO?**

**GUÍA GRATUITA DEL
DMV PARA SU EXAMEN**



**NYC Dept. de
Transportacion**

Seguridad Vial y
Regulaciones

***Chalecos y Cascos de
Seguridad Gratis***



**NYPD Oficina de
Asuntos Comunitarios**

Proporcionará info sobre
motocicletas confiscadas
y cómo prevenirlo



**Departamento de
Bomberos**

Conozca los riesgos de
incendio de las baterías
de litio

**LLÁMENOS PARA
MÁS INFORMACIÓN
718-573-1726**

18 de Abril 2024

Latinos Americanos Unidos

218 Wyckoff Ave, Brooklyn NY 11237

10am-12pm

FOR THE RECORD



Atelier de permis et règles



COMMENT OBTENIR UN PERMIS POUR UNE MOBYLETTE, UNE MOTO, OU UN VEHICULE

QUE FAIRE SI VOTRE MOTO EST CONFISQUEE?

GUIDE DE DMV GRATUIT POUR VOTRE EXAMEN

NYPD Bureau des affaires communautaires



Information sur la confiscation des motos et comment la prévenir

FDNY



En savior plus sur les risques d'incendie des batteries au lithium



NYC Dept. de transport

Sécurité dans les rues et règles

Gilets de sécurité et casques gratuits

APPELLE-NOUS POUR PLUS D'INFORMATION

718-573-1726

le 18 avril 2024

Latinos Americanos Unidos

218 Wyckoff Ave, Brooklyn NY 11237

10am-12pm

Hello,

My name is Diane Enobabor. I am a graduate student at the City University of New York, I study migration across the Americas. I am also the founder and organizer of three critical groups that have supported asylum seekers in New York- BAMSA (Black and Arab Migrant Solidarity Alliance), BCF-MMA (Bushwick City Farms- Migrant Mutual Aid) and currently Africa Is Everywhere- a strategic planning, pan African feminist initiative. We have organized for the past year to support the newly arrived African asylum seeking community. We have organized food drives, know your rights training, and combated neighborhood anti-xenophobia and anti-Black racism in the community where respite centers and family shelters are. BAMSA produced a data report- a survey that actually gave scope to the diversity of African asylum seekers and their needs. IT was the first grassroots organizations had to explain the diversity of African asylum seekers. City officials admitted they were not taking survey of who from Africa was coming, what languages they spoke, and their needs. We got politically mobilized- quickly.

We were able to advocate on behalf of Afrikana, Refugee Transportation Project- and speak to other organizations visiting New York to give insight on the African migrant crisis. We have made ourselves accessible to the city to which we are so grateful, to be able to have these critical conversations, and offer insight toward the best ways the city can assist our new asylum seeking community.

I am writing this specific testimony to make the city aware of its deficit with data collection. Without knowing who is here, this city cannot provide folks with what they need. This looks like legal support (thousands of men are without the ability to file their i-589s), lack of targeted maternal health, inability to actually survey for who may qualify for other protection programs toward regulating status in the United States, access to social services that they qualify for and marking the shifting demographics necessary for holistic and well informed urban planning. This is imperative because without these statistics- much of the work on the ground is not archived, and the work conducted by the city is not chronicled. I urge the city to hire and conduct a thorough survey / investigation on the diversity of African asylum seekers in the respite centers, what type of status are they looking to achieve in the United States and what type of case management do they need. I also know that with the appropriate numbers- the city can assist with the scaling of African service organizations by uplifting their work with city supported data.

We are also here today to speak about the lack of holistic social services and case management afforded Black asylum seeker migrants - specifically those from the continent of Africa and Haiti – in a moment where our new brothers and sisters are escaping the ruins of colonialism, civil war, and capitalist extraction. They are here to

seek a better livelihood, but also to save their life. It is common knowledge that the majority of Black asylum seekers have yet to be able to secure legal representation and process their asylum paperwork. Every day, the number of those who have missed their deadline to apply for asylum increases. Many are at a standstill, unemployed and are facing houselessness, we demand for the city stop neglecting Black migrants.

1. We demand for the city to hold itself and CBO's (Community Based Organizations) accountable to Black migrant asylum seekers. Every CBO or New York Immigration council satellite site that has been allocated funding to assist asylum seekers should receive and provide case management to everyone, including Black African and Afro Caribbean migrants.
2. We demand the city stop allocating state and federal funding meant for asylum seeker services to private corporations. Over 500 million dollars was made available for this manufactured crisis by the city and asylum seekers are in a worse condition than 2022. That funding should be used to increase city employment. This would increase the number of social workers, expand housing services, and invest in public education workers to meet the current needs of all New Yorkers including our new Black migrant community.
3. We demand for the city to provide city materials in languages accessible to the new African migrant community. City notices and CBO workforce development programs, like OSHA or even ESL classes, are not provided in languages that are understood by our newcomers. This limit is xenophobic and racist. Our new Black migrant community members are not a monolith and do not share a single story. Every asylum seeker' needs must be individualized, respected and considered with care.
4. We demand holistic case management- including support, processing and filing I-589s, access to health care, expedited residency status at shelter sites, access to IDNYC without appointments and guaranteed access to livable shelter.
5. We demand for the city to financially support Black led; Black immigrant grassroots organizations that have been proven to offer efficient case management to asylum seekers only. We demand for the city to encourage and support more African service organizations to work in Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island. Every respite center and family shelter should be assigned to a community-centered grassroots organization that can offer culturally specific

human centered case management for all asylum seekers- including Black African and Afro-Caribbean migrants.

[REDACTED]

From: Yosmin Badie <ybadie@bronxdefenders.org>
Sent: Thursday, April 18, 2024 10:02 AM
To: Testimony
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Written Testimony - Hearing on Experience of Black Migrants

[REDACTED]

Good morning,

I am submitting the testimony below on behalf of my client, Mr. Duwayne Baugh, who is a New Yorker currently detained by ICE at the Clinton County Correctional Facility.

Testimony:

Good morning, my name is Duwyane Baugh. I've been in America for 33 years, since I was about 14. I've lived in NYC my whole time here in a few of the boroughs: Brooklyn, Staten Island, the Bronx, Manhattan. Going through this ICE situation has been a great deal of stress and a whole lot of other stuff – physical, mental, emotional, just being away from my family.

The first thing: my wife's health is pretty much deteriorating. She has stage 4 cancer, a rare cancer called adenoid cystic carcinoma, which has a 20% mortality rate. She's already in stage 4, so we're pretty much just fighting to keep her alive. This incarceration is taking a toll on her mentally, physically. It's very stressful because I'm not there to help to provide or take care of her or to help manage our living situation: our kids, our housing. It's just been a great deal to deal with and now she has to deal with it by herself. I'm just hoping to get out here so I can be there to finish taking care of her, make her as comfortable as possible, and be there for my kids. I have 4 kids, the youngest being 12. I need my family and my family needs me. I don't know how much longer God is going to keep her with us but I would love to be there. I just need to get home to my family so I can finish taking care of my wife and hopefully God will give me some more time with her. These ICE detention places are not really ideal for anybody. People treat you different. The place itself is horrible, conditions are horrible, you're laying on concrete slabs. The mattresses are barely thicker than the top of your table, it's always cold, the waters always hot, there's inadequate food. Even just to call home, you have to pay for everything. \$7 to make a phone call, just to hear news from your family and make sure they're okay, make sure they're alive, make sure they're doing well. I know people make mistakes; we all make mistakes. I know the severity of my actions and I know where I was wrong. We can't go back and change time but I know what not to do. I'm just trying to get home to my family so I can help my wife because right now she's going through a lot: the cancer, back and forth to the doctors, and now she's going through housing court, staying in the apartment, get help to relocate, whatever the options are, and I'm not there to alleviate the stress and help to make sure she takes it easy because all that adds to the health and makes her deteriorate much faster. And I don't need that.

We need her. Our kids need her, and I need her. So I'm just trying to get home and do the right thing for my family and myself. I would like to ask for the support of the members of this committee in fighting for my freedom – letters of support would be particularly helpful. If you'd like to support Mr. Baugh, please email my lawyer at ybadie@bronxdefenders.org. Thank you very much.

Yosmin Badie
Pronouns: she/her/hers
Law Graduate
Immigration Practice
The Bronx Defenders
360 East 161st Street
Bronx, NY 10451
Phone: 718-957-9644
Fax: 718-957-9645
www.bronxdefenders.org

PLEASE NOTE: The Bronx Defenders' physical office is currently open in person between Monday - Friday (9AM - 5PM). Our staff can be reached by email and at our office's main phone number: (718)-838-7878 This message contains information which may be confidential and privileged. Unless you are the addressee (or authorized to receive for the addressee), you may not use, copy or disclose to anyone the message or any information contained in the message. If you have received the message in error, please advise the sender by reply e-mail and delete the message.

To the city council,

My name is Gabrielle Roseman, I'm 16 years old and live in Sheepsheadbay Brooklyn, I'm writing to urge you to pass

Intro 0084-2024, Intro 0085-2024, and

T2024-0932. It is the responsibility of NYC ~~and~~

~~the state~~ and our government to assist those in need.

We have the money and tools to help as a state, now is not the time to be apathetic and avoid those in need.

For this reason I think it is extremely important you pass

Intro 0084-2024, Intro 0085-2024, and T2024-0932. Not only

this but mental health being such a big factor in motivation and overall wellbeing, there should be government established programs to provide more assistance for migrants.

To the city council,

My name is Grasjeta IM 15 years old and live in the Bronx. I'm writing to urge you to Pass Intro 0084-2024, Intro 0085-2024 and T 2024-0432. I think NYC need to support migrants and asylum seekers because everyone deserves a safe home, food, clothing, and access to jobs. These people have come here and fled their country's in need of help and resources so why would we turn them away when we have the ability to help them.

To the city council,

My name is Izzy, I'm sixteen years old and I live in Brooklyn, New York. I'm writing to urge you to pass Intro 0084-2024, Intro 0085-2024, and T2024-0932. I firmly believe that NYC needs to support migrants and asylum seekers because they are our neighbors and deserve safe homes, secure jobs, accessible food, and clothing. It would be illogical to deny how the US has played a big role in destabilizing some of the countries people are fleeing. Due to this, we have a responsibility to help and support those working hard for better lives. Living in south Brooklyn, there are multiple shelters and food kitchens near my home. In my church, my community works together to teach English to migrants who are mainly Spanish speakers. I'm part of Sixth Street Community Center in the LES, where we distribute food to those waiting in unimaginably long lines for shelter. Our communities are working together to support migrants and asylum seekers but where is the support from our government? People are struggling in our communities and there is only so much we can do without the support of those in power. This is why I am urgently asking for the city council to pass this legislation.

April 16, 2024

To whom it may concern

My name is Kabir Javaid and I live near Creedmoor shelter for refugees in Queens. I was part of a volunteer group that provided more 25,000 meals before and during Ramadan because NYC fails to provide halal meals and then they hire a doctor to lie to media and say that meals are Halal as if the doctor can check the pulse of the chicken and know whether the meals are halal. NYC is mocking my religion and lying to the public. We have a system in place to make sure halal and adequate meals are provided to Muslims. All halal food providers and restaurants need to be certified. As of 4/16/2024, no vendor of NYC food providing meals to West African Muslim refugees was certified to provide halal meals.

I am writing to let the council know that halal food standards alliance of North America (hfsaa.org) has absolutely no record of anyone related to NYC providing food to Muslims of any certification. NYC is playing politics with our religion and we demand halal meals be provided to Muslim refugees immediately and food be ordered to Halal certified places only and HFSAA will happily provide religious inspections paid for by Muslim community of NYC to ensure Muslim refugees are provided meals from halal facilities or halal restaurants

Thank you

Kabir Javaid

SHAMIMA B.

Hello, my name is Karen Swann. I am a community member living in Brooklyn and I am part of a mutual aid network in New York that has filled the holes of direct services and emergency needs through grassroots mobilization. Every week I help to make and serve food for mostly African and Haitian immigrant men in Clinton Hill, and over time I have engaged with many of them as well as I can given our language barriers. Most of them are very young—in their late teens and early twenties. Some speak French, which I can limp along in, but many more speak Arabic, Wolof, and other languages. It is striking to me how many of them are trying to learn English and are eager to practice, even in the brief encounters I have with them; what also strikes and moves me is their kindness to each other, their collective resilience, and their hopefulness about the lives they might live in this country.

I do not know many of their stories, but it is clear that many of them have had traumatic experiences in their own countries, during their journeys here, and in New York. Many have injuries, they are far from family and community supports, they are not yet able to function in English, they are in an unfamiliar city and culture, they have no one to call on. Many of them have made friends with other immigrants and with people in the mutual aid group and seem so grateful for that support—but the 30 day rule means that that support and those ties are repeatedly broken, and now, with the loss of right to shelter, they face being unhoused at the end of their time in the shelters. I think about my own children—in their 20s and early 30s, about the age of many of these young men—and wonder how they would survive circumstances like these.

These people have been through so much to get here. They just want to work, they are eager to work, they constantly ask for any sort of employment. They have skills that would enable them to become productive residents of New York, but they are at a standstill—not able to secure legal representation, not able to navigate the complex asylum process, and facing unemployment and houselessness.

The city and CBOs (Community Based Organizations) must make themselves accountable to Black migrant asylum seekers. Every CBO or New York Immigration council satellite site that has been allocated funding to assist asylum seekers should receive and provide case management to everyone, including Black African and Afro Caribbean migrants.

The city must stop allocating state and federal funding meant for asylum seeker services to private corporations. Over 500 million dollars was made available for this manufactured crisis by the city and asylum seekers are in a worse condition than 2022. That funding should be used to increase city employment. This would increase the number of social workers, expand housing services, and invest in public education workers to meet the current needs of all New Yorkers including our new Black migrant community.

The city must provide city materials in languages accessible to the new African migrant community. City notices and CBO workforce development programs, like OSHA or even ESL classes, are not provided in languages that are understood by our newcomers. This

limit is xenophobic and racist. Our new Black migrant community members are not a monolith and do not share a single story. Every asylum seeker's needs must be individualized, respected and considered with care.

We must provide holistic case management- including support, processing and filing I-589s, access to health care, expedited residency status at shelter sites, access to IDNYC without appointments and guaranteed access to livable shelter.

The city must also financially support Black led Black immigrant grassroots organizations that have been proven to offer efficient case management to asylum seekers only. We demand for the city to encourage and support more African service organizations to work in Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island. Every respite center and family shelter should be assigned to a community-centered grassroots organization that can offer culturally specific human centered case management for all asylum seekers- including Black African and Afro-Caribbean migrants.

April 18, 2024
Katherine J Hallet

[REDACTED]
Brooklyn, NY 11233
[REDACTED]

I, Katherine J Hallet stand in full support of T2024-1544, 0084-2024, 0085-2024, as well as Resolutions 0739-2024 and 0340-2024. I urge their swift implementation for the betterment of our city and the lives of asylum seekers seeking refuge within our borders.

My parents were 1st gen and 2nd generation immigrants. I am married to a Nigerian man and my daughter is the child of an immigrant. I am in support of this.

Thank you.

Dr. Katherine J Hallet

Committee on Immigration and Hospitals
Dear Committee Chair,

My name is Kiki Valentine Rakowsky and as a resident of Red Hook, Brooklyn, I stand in full support of T2024-1544, 0084-2024, 0085-2024, as well as Resolutions 0739-2024 and 0340-2024. I urge their swift implementation for the betterment of our city and the lives of asylum seekers seeking refuge within our borders. I am a fulltime student, single mother, and volunteer advocate speaking on behalf of a coalition consisting of 200 individuals representing nearly 20 associations, businesses, organizations and individuals in and around Red Hook, as well as the corps of hundreds of donors and volunteers who directly served nearly 800 asylum seekers in shelter when temporarily housed in our community.

I also ask that NYC Asylum Seeker Operations be subject to a full review by the City Comptroller. Further, it is of the utmost importance that the right to shelter law be honored and the administration immediately reverse the 30-and-60 day limits imposed on newcomers, including individuals and families with children.

I am a fulltime student, single mother, and advocate who wholeheartedly endorses this legislation. I speak on behalf of a coalition consisting of 200 individuals representing nearly 20 associations, businesses, organizations and individuals in and around Red Hook, as well as the corps of hundreds of donors and volunteers who directly served nearly 800 asylum seekers in shelter when the city failed to. It was “early” in this crisis and the understanding was that systems had not yet been established.

Amidst these efforts, a consistent message emerged from these individuals: **they are eager, prepared, and willing to contribute to the workforce.** Shelters currently operated by NYC Health + Hospitals and in partnership with NYC Emergency Management both tout “a thoughtful and strategic approach to addressing the needs of different demographic groups”. This did not occur and has not been the case. We need more than sound bites from these well paid agencies who have had nearly two years to solve for these issues. We demand that the new provider be held to a higher standard than what H+H has been able to deliver.

Remarkably, notification of the men's shelter at BCT occurred 72 hours before the city officially informed any district elected officials of the transition. The administration's stance on its inability to contact local elected representatives or communities when siting facilities such as the HERRC shelter at the Brooklyn Cruise Terminal and the new Gowanus shelter is concerning and lacks transparency. Despite opening, according to NYC Asylum Seekers Operations, dozens of shelters for migrants, the city continues to fail to provide adequate public notice for such significant undertakings so that **the communities that are actually serving these people in need in culturally competent ways** can prepare, mobilize, and have everything they need to fill in the gaps that the administration, in nearly two years, has not been able to get a handle on. In light of the ongoing humanitarian crisis and the increasing number of individuals seeking asylum, these resolutions are timely and imperative. The city administration must reassess its approach to sheltering refugees, prioritize transparency and community engagement, fund language access by utilizing NGOs and **community groups that do not have nonprofit status, and find viable solutions** to uphold its commitment to equity and justice for all residents, including asylum seekers and migrants.

On January 18th, 2023, I was informed of the temporary conversion of the Brooklyn Cruise Terminal (BCT) into a temporary HERRC shelter for male asylum seekers by way of a clandestine courtesy call from a member of a City agency, allowing me to alert the community and make necessary preparations for their arrival. They were to be transitioning from the Watson Hotel humanitarian relief center along with other newly arriving adult men as space permitted. This site offered essential services such as medical assistance, food, laundry, and reticketing, under the auspices of ensuring the well-being and dignity of asylum seekers. This is not what took place. The facility, with a capacity of 1000 cots set up in a congregate setting with lights left on all night and lacking privacy, few showers (off-site and outside in a parking lot in winter), or security for personal possessions in the form of a locker or safe space. The Muslim asylees I spoke with said they were forced to pray in the only open space in the shelter which was located behind the toilets and is against their religion. They had no place to pray. I

advocated and got them one. I recall that Mayor Eric Adams visited the shelter and played ping pong with its residents. He alleged to have spent the night there to prove that it contained livable conditions. I never heard accounts or evidence of his sleeping at BCT. Our community's ability to facilitate connections and advocate for communication, resources, and coordination efforts and ability to nimbly adjust to this influx of neighbors and treat them with dignity, along with countless others who appeared in chambers this week, is evidence that what needs to be done is possible. It's just not possible with so many contracts coming and going and without oversight and meaningful community input. The administration should be consulting with stakeholders and ad hoc volunteer providers to hear directly what is needed and how to approach finding solutions. As we heard in testimony, there are a lot of answers that programs are being "piloted" and "restarted" without significant gains in actual success.

On January 23, 2023 when BCT was announced, Mayor Adams stated to City and State that, "I don't believe a lot of people are fully comprehending...a crisis and we have overwhelmed our infrastructure and our capacity to use the traditional methods. We are responding to this crisis better than any other municipality – not only a bed, food, clothing, health care, [educating children](#) – it is commendable what New York City is doing to meet their moral and legal responsibilities." Yet children are perhaps the most vulnerable part of this narrative and many are not enrolled in school, forced to move every 60 days, selling candy on subway trains without supervision during school hours, and, again on April 16th, we heard asylees testified that they are sleeping on floors in places of worship without a bed and with limited access to food. At the time BCT transitioned to a shelter and opened, New York City was grappling with the arrival of 41,000 new immigrants, underscoring the urgency and necessity of such shelters. At 41,000, we had already reached a "breaking point". Today, that number has increased by almost 160,000 with nearly 65,000 asylees currently housed by the city. Yet there has been no change in operations to accommodate their needs as expressed and verified in the testimony and answers heard on April 16th. Pleas from all corners of the city and both sides of the aisle to the President and Feds are not being answered. **There is no one coming to save us.** We need another solution and can't wait any longer.

During the 72-hour period before refugees starting arriving at BCT, our community swiftly mobilized, gathering thousands of pounds of weather-appropriate clothing and supplies in anticipation of supporting individuals arriving in winter without essential items such as coats, underwear, socks, and basic necessities. Through this work, I encountered a diverse group of people from various corners of the globe, all seeking refuge from persecution and injustice in their home countries, including Venezuela, Colombia, Honduras, Ecuador, Senegal, Nigeria, and Russia. Our very small local mutual aid group, initially focused on serving elderly residents with grocery and medication deliveries, quickly pivoted to support these new citizens. We established a free store where individuals could access clothing, advocates to assist them, or just to be able to sit in a chair and speak with someone in their native tongue. We were the welcome center, a makeshift Ellis Island. Recognizing the urgent need for support in navigating unfamiliar territories, immigration processes, and to build community to address transport trauma and being alone in a new country.

Working alongside our elected officials, we organized age and origin-based WhatsApp groups to provide ESL language classes. Since it was January, asylees needed coats, appropriate footwear, socks, underwear and other clothing essentials, all which we provided along with suitcases. We made available supplemental nutrition of culturally competent cuisine. None of this was available in the shelter. We provided recreational activities and I secured a donation of art supplies which I directed to Laura Atlas, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs for H+H, for the purpose of art therapy at BCT. We conducted our own intakes and provided pathways to social services support (relocations, Metrocards, phone repairs), as well as fulfilling ad hoc needs as they arose every day until May 1st, 2023 when the terminal reopened for cruise ship operations.

Communities providing nuanced support to specific groups that cannot be helped by the administration must receive resources from the City to help address the needs of refugees. **It is not the responsibility of communities to conduct food and clothing drives, to perform legal services, or to find solutions to these problems at no cost to the city.** The people are paying for, feeding, advocating for, and in many cases HOUSING asylees while agency brass collect media accolades and, typically, six-figure paychecks. Given the scale and impact of this

humanitarian issue, it is essential for the city to engage in transparent and inclusive decision-making processes, innovate, and rely on - and compensate - the people power within our communities and fully utilize their specific expertise.

Being on the ground with these people and hearing the stories of their global journey to freedom has been a staggering and eye-opening experience. I want to share one story with you. In an odyssey fraught with peril and determination, a young Nigerian asylum seeker I encountered embarked on a journey that spanned continents and borders, from the bustling streets of Nigeria to the far reaches of the United States seeking safety, peace and opportunity. Through the jungles of Brazil, the rugged terrains of Peru, and the winding paths of Ecuador, this courageous individual pressed on, driven by the hope of finding safety and refuge. Crossing Colombia, he navigated the dense forests of Panama where he thought he was going to die by being attacked and torn apart by the crocodiles who call the rivers home. Enduring the challenges of Central America, he persevered, alone, each step a testament to his resilience. Finally arriving in Mexico and crossing the border to the land of opportunity, his journey was far from over. He was placed in a detention center in Texas, then moved to Mississippi, then Colorado, and finally to New York. His ICE appointment loomed in November 2023 and was scheduled in Hawaii with no way to attend so a relocation of venue had to be created for him with no assistance from legal services. I had to make many calls to remedy this and move his case to New York. I found him a job interview and paid for an Uber for him to get there. He secured the job and is still employed there today. He is living in an apartment with three others and is able to attend church. All of this is possible, mind you, **only because he is a Nigerian who can speak fluent English.**

Please let New York City reflect the values of the United States of America to find actionable solutions to support the human rights of our newest citizens and allow them to work and enjoy the entitled freedoms our forefathers fought so hard for everyone on our soil to embrace so that they too can take part in our economy and become part of the fabric of this great Nation.

Thank you.

Committee on Immigration and Hospitals

Dear Committee Chair,

I would like to add to my testimony that I recommend a hiring campaign within the new citizen community to recruit all who are bilingual and have capable fluency in English and an uncommon language and that they be trained and hired as part of authentic workforce training and implementation as has been purported by Asylum Seeker Operations and MOIA. In order to do this, swift organization must take place to mobilize and implement the following:

1. Through NGOs, community groups, and individuals, identify those who qualify for consideration and create a database with their language, contact information, and status in the legal processes.
2. Concurrently, procure whatever metric data containing specific country of origin for the total population that has arrived through our shelter system since March 15, 2022.
3. Obtain and amend accordingly any existing training programs provided by the administration, NGOs, and community groups.
4. Determine where funding can be reallocated to address this emergency.
5. Contact potential candidates.
6. Determine how they can be paid.
7. Pay them for initial and ongoing training.
8. Determine which locations throughout the five boroughs has the highest concentration of asylees from areas of specific origin
9. Schedule and install them as needed on-site.
10. Track all metrics and remain in constant conversation with a COS dedicated to this initiative.

Based on the words in earnest and performance by the administration and stakeholders at the April 16th hearing, I sincerely believe this is a project that can be quickly enacted as administration is well staffed and organized. We must collaborate in new ways to improve outcomes for our most vulnerable populations. I indirectly work alongside DHS, DSS and other Mayoral administrations through my work with www.shapnyc.com and if agencies can be flexible and open-minded, change can occur. While still operating within their bureaucratic limitations, the agency must utilize the flexibility of community organizations and receive permission to pay them and the asylees employed to facilitate execution. I believe this can be accomplished. We are all very smart and want to help in meaningful ways.

I would also like to share what I wrote to Councilmember Aviles in a private communication because, for the sake of transparency, there are other possible solutions to increase the humanity of this crisis and provide dignity and freedom to live as future Americans, all while contributing to our schools, communities, economy, and culture. Let us not forget that *Callahan v. Carey* was

brought to enforce the Right to Shelter based on Article XVII of the New York State Constitution. This states that “the aid, care, and support of the needy are public concerns and shall be provided by the state and by such of its subdivisions.” Alleviation should also be provided by the state of New York in its entirety.

“It doesn't help that the agencies are slippery. I know in my heart that there are good people within them. It's like being a truffle pig, sniffing them out. You know how, on site visits etc, everyone's on their best behavior and then, if we are able to stay connected with those in need who are utilizing the agencies, the truth is eventually revealed. The bureaucracy is the core issue and fighting it is imperative but we cannot wait any longer for federal money. Everyone has asked. Tried. Demanded. We have to move to help these people. We need a Plan B, and long before winter. I agree that we need cultural competency, diaspora, dialects, and to create or strengthen communities, as architects of humanity. Per the language of law, the health, financial, and social services burden is not specified anywhere to be relegated only to the five boroughs of NYC. We have a huge and beautiful state full of opportunities. Why has NYC been forced underwater? In the absence of political will, we need to ameliorate some of this burden because we know this is not working. We need to find ways to put MOIA and H+H to work. The issue is also when those in need get information about services and connect with an agency, you know, the agencies are backlogged. The issues presented for asylees are also what I am seeing with DHS and DSS.”

I believe I heard that H+H's contract will be replaced. If this is the case, now is the time to start off on the right and different foot. Closing in on two years of this with increased suffering, what was revealed in the April 16th hearing is that we have the administration and manpower, mindpower, resources, and have identified specific needs of the people. In addition to oral testimony from refugees, by hearing directly from the providers we now know with certainty and clarity what is needed. It is up to us to show, as a leader of the world, how we are the innovators we present ourselves to be and show the country how a city works effectively with all layers of municipalities, groups, and populations to pave a new way that is reflective of this inaugural crisis for our city. We can do this.

Thank you to all of the New York City Council and everyone who has spent \$1 or 1,000 hours in support of these people, brothers and sisters we are obligated to defend, support and integrate into our country with human decency.

Kiki Valentine Rakowsky

My name is Lamis Idris. I am the youth speaker for a community-based organization named AwladAlNile, translated to 'Children of the Nile.' We are a Sudanese organization. I am submitting this testimony to assert the urgent additional support for Black Migrants in NYC. I have been in communication with Adama Bah, who has told me horrendous stories of the circumstances migrants have to live through. Firstly, many Sudanese Migrants leave through the Chadian border, then travel to Turkey, and then to Latin America, where many of them walk by foot to get to the border. Not only did they endure the dangerous journey here, but they were greeted with meager support from the city. Women do not even have hijabs to cover their hair adequately. Men are living in the same outfits they arrived here with. In what city can we allow that to happen? Not only is there a lack of hygiene, but many come here not knowing English, and there is no proper translation. One fundamental issue is that Arabic translators are available, but not Sudanese Arabic translators. For example, there is no way a Moroccan translator can understand a Sudanese migrant; their words, phrases, and dialects are so different. This city needs to do better. The systemic anti-blackness in even the provision of resources is shameful. As a Sudanese New York Native, I should not have even been writing this. I should ask the city to provide resources. They should already be there. While I wish I could be there in person, I am a student and have class during the hearing, but I am writing this to underscore and amplify the need for more social services for Sudanese migrants.

Dear City Council,

My name is Malaya. I am a senior at NEST+m, located in the Lower East Side, and a member of the Sixth Street Community Center. The Lower East Side is my home, and my experiences and compassion within this neighborhood motivate me to advocate for asylum seekers here and throughout the city. I strongly urge and support the following bills that would improve the conditions of those in need.

The bills I am testifying for are Intro 0084-2024, Intro 0085-2025, and T2024-0932. These would require the government to evaluate the needs of the individuals seeking asylum. This would be done by surveying their financial needs and their job employment obstacles, as well as their health needs and experiences. The latter bill would require the government to submit reports on their spending, temporary housing, immigration applications, and demographics. These reports would be helpful in many ways to help improve conditions for asylum seekers in NYC and establish the appropriate budgets to help them.

New York is a diverse city—a sanctuary for people from all over the world—which is what makes it so beautiful. Our duty as a city is to support everyone, especially when they are going through some of the hardest times in their lives, and to remember that despite current circumstances, we are all human. The struggles of anyone in this city no matter what should be addressed by our government, and I believe that this legislation would be an essential step in doing so.

Sincerely,
Malaya

Mariel Acosta, GC Migrant Solidarity Group / Colectiva de Ayuda Mutua
mariel.acosta86@gmail.com
City Council Committee on Immigration
Hearing on the Experiences of Black Migrants in New York City
April 16, 2024

Members of the City Council Committee on Immigration, Chair Avilés, thank you for addressing this important issue.

My name is Mariel Acosta and I'm a volunteer at [Bushwick City Farm](#), a community garden in Bed-Stuy which has become a space for mostly West and North African migrants to cook and spend time; essentially a respite from the Stockton "respite" center where some live and from where others have been evicted due to Mayor Adam's inhumane 30 days shelter limit. I'm also here today as a member of the broader mutual aid collective that has taken on several tasks to support our new neighbors. I also speak to you as a Black immigrant, a community member and as a parent.

April is National Bilingual/Multilingual Learner Advocacy Month, and affecting all asylum seekers and migrants, especially at the intersection of race (i.e. Black African and Black Latino, Caribbean migrants speakers of several varieties of French, Spanish, Pulaar, Arabic, Wolof, Bambara, Garifuna, Creole, Tigrinya, and others) are issues related to language access or the lack thereof, due to the limited qualified translators and interpreters migrant shelters' managements have sourced. For instance, migrants often receive mistranslated materials (even in citywide designated languages) or not translated at all. This stands in direct violation of various sections and implementation plans described in Local Law 30 of 2017. The lack of access to information due to insufficient or absent translation and interpretation services, in turn, limits migrants' access to social services they need towards applying for their asylum, ID, TPS, insurance and other important documentation and services. This deliberate lack of adequate language access leaves under-resourced mutual aid groups scrambling to pick up the slack of the companies that get paid millions of dollars to provide these services.

Today is the second to last day of the annual Black Maternal Health Week (April 11 - 17) and I'd also like to highlight Reproductive Justice issues, more specifically maternal health and the disproportionate threat of maternal mortality Black women face. In the U.S., Black women are dying at [3 to 4x the rate of white women during and after childbirth](#)* regardless of income and level of education, due to racist medical practices. To this, add the variables of Black asylum seekers' immigration status, language barriers, the trauma of experiencing displacement from their countries of origin, of having to traverse several countries on foot while pregnant to get to the US and then being retraumatized and revictimized by racism and xenophobia by institutions that are supposed to be providing services. As a mother and activist, I [started working with](#)

[professional birth workers](#)** to organize and facilitate workshops directed to pregnant migrant women to offer guidance and material and emotional support when we noticed they lacked access and information to key services pertaining to perinatal care. Through our mutual aid work we've learned that pregnant migrants aren't receiving proper prenatal care and many women and children are malnourished due to shelters providing inedible meals, not providing meals at all, and [disrupting mutual aid food distribution](#)*** As volunteer-based mutual aid groups without access to steady funds, we're only able to support a small percentage of the people that need these services and this Birthing Circle project represents a band aid compared to the amount of migrants with unmet needs.

While proposing your bills today (especially [Int 0739-2024](#)) and when discussing the experiences of Black Migrants in New York City, I hope you will also consider a plan to hold accountable the public and private entities responsible for the management of the shelters, where this, already very vulnerable population is housed. These are companies that are getting paid millions of dollars to provide services and who do a poor job and whose slack is taken on by mutual aid groups who are on-the-ground every day doing the work without receiving any funding.

Asylum seeking families and individuals need access to anti-racist trauma informed health care!
And access to nourishing meals!
And stable housing NOW!

*<https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/features/maternal-mortality/index.html>

** <https://studentparents.commonsc.gc.cuny.edu/2024/03/16/monthly-birthing-club/>

*** <https://hellgatenyc.com/migrants-adams-cold-hungry>

New York City Council Committees on Immigration

Tuesday April 16, 2024; 10:00am

Hearing on Oversight- The Experiences of Black Migrants in New York City

Testimony of [Moirá Shoush] [Student Organizer at Columbia University]

Thank you to the Committee on Immigration for holding this public hearing to address the Experiences of Black Migrants in New York City. My name is [Moirá Shoush, Student Organizer at Columbia University] and I am testifying on how the city's failure to provide meaningful language access for migrants speaking indigenous Afro-diasporic languages contributes to their inability to access city services or to effectively communicate with city agencies.

The city's current language access laws only require city agencies to provide language access services for "designated citywide languages", a group of ten languages that currently only includes one indigenous Afro-diasporic language, Haitian Creole. This policy is a harmful departure from the city's previous language access law of 2003, that required city agencies to provide language assistance in individuals' primary language, defined by that law as "the language in which an LEP individual chooses to communicate with others."

Today, I will speak to the easily-preventable obstacles my friend Cheikh, a Senegalese asylum seeker, faced due to a lack of meaningful language access laws in the city. I asked Cheikh if he would be interested in coming to speak for himself, and he refused, saying that after his last experience with a city agency, he is not interested in coming back. Today, I am here to share his story.

Cheikh is a 25 year-old migrant who arrived in New York City last summer. His primary language is Wolof, but he also speaks some French and very limited English. Since arriving in the city, he has been mostly working as an UberEats delivery biker. One night in September, I received a call from Cheikh saying he was with the police and needed me to translate. The NYPD officer I spoke with on the phone explained that Cheikh had violated a law requiring all commercial cyclists to wear helmets, and that he was writing him a Criminal Summons. When I explained to Cheikh the law he allegedly violated, he told me that he had already ended his shift, and could prove that using the UberEats app.

When I relayed this information to the officer, he responded that it was too late, because when he asked Cheikh if he was working, he responded yes. I told the officer that Cheikh did not understand the question, and that regardless, he had proof that he did not violate the law. The officer completely disregarded what I said because he had already finished writing the summons.

In this situation, not only did the city fail to provide meaningful language access to a Black migrant, they also used his status as a Limited English Proficient individual against him. To avoid repeating this stressful situation, Cheikh wanted to have a Wolof-English translator at the Criminal Summons Court. I called the court ahead of time to request a Wolof translator, and was assured that one would be present.

On the day of, however, only a French translator was available. Cheikh was essentially coerced into conducting his hearing in a language he was not comfortable speaking. This is unacceptable.

The city's failure to provide meaningful language access for African migrants in their primary language is indicative of the city's abandonment of these communities and their anti-Black policy-making. My testimony reveals the weaknesses in the city's existing language access policy that only provides meaningful language access for *one* Afro-Indigenous language despite New York having the largest Black immigrant population of any metropolitan area. I would like to stress the urgent need for the city to update its language access policy to protect Black migrants from the unnecessary harm caused by their inability to access city services or effectively communicate with city agencies.

Testimony by the New York Legal Assistance Group

before the NYC Council Committee on Immigration regarding:

**Introduction 0085-2024A, A health survey of newly arrived migrants and asylum seekers,
and to repeal such amendments upon the expiration thereof; The Experiences of Black
Migrants in New York City**

Chair Avilés, Council Members, and staff, good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Immigration Committee. My name is Monica Tulchinsky, and I am a Senior Staff Attorney in the LegalHealth division of the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG). NYLAG uses the power of the law to help New Yorkers in need combat social, racial, and economic injustice. We address emerging and urgent legal needs with comprehensive, free civil legal services, impact litigation, policy advocacy, and community education. NYLAG serves immigrants, seniors, the homebound, families facing foreclosure, renters facing eviction, low-income consumers, those in need of government assistance, children in need of special education, domestic violence survivors, persons with disabilities, patients with chronic illness or disease, low-wage workers, low-income members of the LGBTQ community, Holocaust survivors, veterans, as well as others in need of free legal services.

Health Survey of Newly Arrived Immigrants

LegalHealth, a division of NYLAG, is the largest medical-legal partnership in the United States. LegalHealth provides free legal assistance to New Yorkers who have serious or chronic health problems and face financial hardship. We bring together legal and medical professionals to improve the lives of patients and families when and where they need it most – in the healthcare

setting. LegalHealth serves 38 hospitals across New York City, including the entire Health + Hospitals public health system, and we handle over 10,000 legal matters each year.

NYLAG is proud to operate in a City that values its immigrant citizens and supports much-needed services to them through a variety of funding streams. Long-term, continued investment in legal services, and leveraging the deep expertise housed within organizations long engaged in this work, is crucial to meeting the current and future needs of immigrant families in New York. Our testimony today is focused on Introduction 0085-2024A proposing a health survey of newly arrived immigrants and asylum seekers.¹ Having operated our medical-legal partnership for over 20 years, we understand the nexus between health and legal issues, and its impact on the Social Determinants of Health. Social Determinants of Health are the non-medical circumstances that can directly affect one's health as well as limit access to quality healthcare. These include but are not limited to income,² racism, access to home care, secure quality housing, immigration status, and health insurance coverage. Racism as a SDOH affects Black people in the United States most significantly. Due to historical, structural, and medical racism, Black Americans suffer from significantly worse health outcomes and higher mortality rates.³ Black immigrants are particularly vulnerable due to the intersectional impact of racism and immigration status on health.⁴

NYLAG provides civil legal services to immigrant New Yorkers through a variety of our programming. We provide assistance with housing issues, public benefits access, immigration

¹ We are not testifying on bill T2024-0932, "Reports on the response to asylum seeker arrivals and requiring the use of budget codes for funding associated with the response to asylum seeker arrivals." However, we note that the collection of un-anonymized information about the status of submitted immigration applications would be deeply troubling.

² I would bring the Council's attention to an article in last week's New York Times entitled, "Many Patients Don't Survive End- Stage Poverty," speaking to the link between health outcomes and the Social Determinants of Health. See <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/11/opinion/doctor-safety-net-hospital.html>

³ See <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4181672/> ; <https://www.stkate.edu/academics/healthcare-degrees/racism-in-healthcare>

⁴ See <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/five-key-facts-about-black-immigrants-experiences-in-the-united-states/>

applications, health insurance coverage, and defending immigrants in immigration court, among others. Since Spring of 2022, in response to the large numbers of newly arrived immigrants, community-based organizations and legal service providers, NYLAG among them, came together to develop innovative programming to respond to both the emerging, as well as ongoing, need for services. In 2023, NYLAG served 27,118 immigrants. In the same year, LegalHealth alone served immigrants from 145 countries in a total of 5,600 legal matters including but not limited to immigration, housing, and public benefits. In 2023, LegalHealth provided legal services to 216 Venezuelans, 623 Ecuadorians, and 246 Colombians, countries from which a large portion of newly arrived New Yorkers fled.⁵ NYLAG harnesses the power of law to address patients' SDOH, promoting stability, security, and ultimately improving health outcomes.

LegalHealth has seen firsthand the landscape of the social determinants of health, health challenges and related legal issues that immigrant New Yorkers face – and the need for funding for both health and legal services. Many immigrants who come to our hospital legal clinics need to stay in New York City's shelter system and request various types of related legal assistance. Most troublingly, currently most new-immigrant adults are only permitted to stay in shelter for 30 days, unless they can prove "extenuating circumstances," so far a loosely defined concept.⁶ If they are not able to prove extenuating circumstances, some will have no choice but to sleep on the street. And once sleeping outside, their health is likely to rapidly deteriorate.⁷

⁵ See <https://www.cityandstateny.com/policy/2023/08/venezuela-and-colombia-are-top-countries-origin-nyc-asylum-seekers/389888/#:~:text=As%20of%20July%2030%2C%20people,18%25%20and%2013%25%20respectively>

⁶ See https://iapps.courts.state.ny.us/nyscef/ViewDocument?docIndex=mMvITZFjq_PLUS_X/RU7jGZrf4Q==

⁷ See <https://nhhc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/homelessness-and-health.pdf>

For those lucky enough to obtain shelter placements, NYC shelters do not typically provide healthy food options⁸ and may be located in “food deserts.” Unfortunately, we must advise the vast majority of our new immigrant clients that they do not qualify for food stamps, which would allow them to access food outside the shelter. The lack of access to quality food exacerbates underlying medical issues, such as diabetes, hypertension, and kidney issues. Immigrants often also request assistance with shelter accommodations because they or their children have disabilities and/or suffer from allergies to rodents and/or cockroaches, which often infest shelter housing.⁹ For anyone, but especially for children, living in such conditions can severely impact the respiratory system and lead to multiple Emergency Room admissions.

One of the many services we provide in our hospital legal clinics is advice on whether patients qualify for public benefits. Many immigrants we meet in our legal clinics are in shelter precisely because they do not qualify for rental assistance, public housing, or any other housing benefits. With housing availability and affordability at an all-time low in NYC, immigrants face incredible barriers to housing, much less affordable housing. In light of the new limits on shelter stays,¹⁰ many immigrants have and will experience housing instability, living in overcrowded conditions or at worst become street homeless. This has already happened to so many of our clients, who after 30 days in shelter have had no choice but to sleep outside, on the subway or on the floor of religious establishments. Housing instability is a serious public health concern and

⁸ See <https://www.fox5ny.com/news/nyc-migrant-crisis-shelter-food-insecurity>

⁹ See https://www.nysenate.gov/sites/default/files/horrors_in_homeless_housing_-_full_report.pdf

¹⁰ See <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/investigations/migrant-crisis/nyc-right-to-shelter-rule-settled/5228845/>

causes a range of physical and mental health issues, including chronic disease and premature death.¹¹

In addition, many immigrants have serious and chronic illnesses for which legal interventions are needed. Many of the immigrants we serve, including recent arrivals, have suffered injuries or trauma because of their arduous journeys to get to the US. Some immigrants suffered such severe physical injury and trauma in their home countries that they undertook great personal risk to come here, and some become ill after arriving in this country. Legal interventions are needed in these cases to ensure access to health insurance and ultimately to care. These legal interventions are required because lack of current immigration status prevents access to many forms of health insurance and care, which ultimately detrimentally impacts health outcomes without intervention.¹²

We urge the Council to pass Introduction 0085-2024A. This bill would provide the needed information to understand the health needs of the immigrant communities in New York, and thereby adequately address their health concerns. In considering immigrants' long-term health needs, the Council should not forget the social needs, including legal services, that often impact health. We are at a very critical point in serving the immigrant population in New York City due to recent drastic cuts in funding for immigrant services,¹³ with more possibly on the horizon.

¹¹ "A study of newly homeless people in the New York City shelter system found that 6 percent had diabetes, 17 percent had hypertension, 17 percent had asthma, 35 percent had major depression, and 53 percent had a substance use disorder — indicating that chronic disease is more common among people who are newly homeless than among the general population.²⁵ People who are homeless also have an increased risk of premature death.... The health effects of homelessness can begin early in life, as pregnant women who are homeless are more likely to deliver preterm and low birthweight babies." <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/housing-instability>

¹² <https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-032013-182419>
<https://genderpolicyreport.umn.edu/immigration-status-a-political-determinant-of-health/>

¹³ See <https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/nyc-slashing-spending-on-asylum-seeker-services-by-another-10-mayor-adams-says/>

The Experience of Black Migrants in New York City

We want to uplift the testimony, statements, and insight of Black migrants regarding what their experiences and needs are, as well as our esteemed colleagues and partners at African Communities Together, Black Alliance for Immigrant Justice (BAJI) and Pan-African Community Development Association, and the panelists from Afrikana and Undocublack, among others.

Legal Service providers, NYLAG's Immigrant Protection Unit among them, have come together to develop innovative programming to maximize the limited legal resources and personnel and to ensure that linguistic and cultural needs are incorporated in service delivery. We have called this program the Pro Se Plus Project (PSPP) and have sought out and secured private funding to pilot this project. The PSPP is centering community-based organizations, such as African Communities Together, Venezuelan Immigrant Assistance (VIA), and MASA, to provide linguistically and culturally appropriate orientation, information, and guidance. While the PSPP collaborative does not track racial data, we have served Black migrants from all recently arrived immigrant communities, including Guinean, Senegalese, and Mauritanian immigrants from Africa, Afro-Latino immigrants from Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, and Honduras, and Afro-Caribbean immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Haiti, and Cuba. NYLAG has provided 180 consultations to immigrants from primarily-Black countries and 50 pro se application filings for recently arrived immigrants from primarily-Black countries.

Because race and ethnicity are bases for seeking asylum, NYLAG works closely with our community partners to engage our clients in discussions about racial persecution, discrimination, and structural injustices that will inform their applications for immigration relief. NYLAG collaborates with Black Alliance for Immigrant Justice (BAJI) and Pan-African Community Development Association to educate ourselves on the nuances of our clients' needs and the constellation of challenges Black immigrants face in their journey towards stability, integration, and immigration relief.

Finally, NYLAG recognizes that Black immigrants are more vulnerable to immigration enforcement and surveillance and more vulnerable to the criminal justice system due to over policing and racial profiling which create a negative spiral for Black immigrants' ability to achieve positive outcomes on their immigration case and protection from deportation. NYLAG work closely with the Office of Asylum Seeker Operations, the city and state NYIFUP providers, public defenders, and the Immigrant Defense Project (IDP) to receive referrals for immigrants who are detained or at imminent risk of detention through our Rapid Response Legal Collaborative (RRLC).

NYLAG met A.S. who is a young male asylum seeker from Guinea at a community site in the Bronx, NY for an in-person consultation. A.S. and his family were repeatedly targeted and persecuted by the Guinean military due to their political opinion and their ethnic group, Fulani. On one occasion, military officials broke into A.S.'s family home and attempted to rape his aunt. A.S. was stabbed multiple times in the face and abdomen by these officials when he intervened and protected his family and aunt. Consequentially, he has suffered chronic, long-term health issues in his abdomen and has been treated multiple times on an emergency basis at NYC hospitals. NYLAG filed a pro se asylum application on behalf of A.S., and then connected him with our PSPP partner organization, African Communities Together, to connect him with case management services in his preferred language and apply for health insurance so that he can seek non-emergency medical treatment for his condition.

A.B. is a Guinean asylum seeker who was targeted and harmed by the police due to her political opinion and ethnic group, Fulani, and who suffered female genital mutilation ("FGM"), forced marriage, and domestic violence in her home country. NYLAG provided A.B. an in-person consultation at a community partner site in the Bronx, NY and assisted her with a pro se asylum application at one of our PSPP clinics. At the clinic, A.B. confided that she continues to experience

chronic gynecological issues related to the FGM that she suffered. NYLAG referred her to PSPP partner organization, African Communities Together, for case management services in her preferred language and to connect her with culturally appropriate and sensitive medical care.

I want to once again take the opportunity to thank Chair Avilés and the members of the Committee for their exceptional leadership and commitment to overseeing issues related to immigrants in New York City. NYLAG would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of these matters with the Committee further.

Respectfully Submitted,

Monica Tulchinsky

New York Legal Assistance Group

My name is Oliver Henry, I am a student in Manhattan. I live within blocks of Tompkins Square Park where I frequently see firsthand the long lines of asylum seekers awaiting shelter. While distributing food and other aid to these migrants with the South Street community center, we also can see the dire state of need that they are in. Therefore, I support Intros 0084 and 0085, local laws which would increase oversight on the conditions the migrants are in, making it easier to alleviate their condition.

My name is Peter Tarson. My great-grandfather, Jules Tarson born Jules Tartasky, served time in an imperial Russian labor camp, presumably for his political beliefs or Jewish ethnicity. He came to New York City at the turn of the last century as an impoverished immigrant, but, with the help of tolerant and competent immigration officials, as well as hard work and a supportive partner, raised a family whose children were able to ascend into America's postwar middle class, and prosper today.

My family no longer lives in New York City, but we benefitted greatly from NYC's accessibility, humanitarianism, and economic opportunities. I want to urge us to extend these same opportunities to the displaced of today, those facing torture and political repression in Sub-Saharan Africa for trying to exercise the liberties our Constitution protects. Hundreds of African refugees are being stored in shelters in Brooklyn without running water or access to the transportation to be able to become employed. Bureaucratic bottlenecks are resulting in African migrants losing access to transportation, being unable to resolve their cases, and being sent home. An immigrant named Mahomet just last year was unable to get any form of naturalization because the car required to take him to the appointment simply disappeared. We cannot let people live in dangerously overcrowded conditions without potable running water in a nation of our wealth.

Addressing this would not come at the expense of our native-born working class. This is an issue of basic humanitarianism and professionalism in the use of government resources. None of us like to see our siblings suffering. Change is necessary.

April 15th, 2024

To: New York City Council Committee on Immigration, Committee on Hospitals

From^[1]: Shobana Ramasamy, M.D.; Allen S. Keller, M.D.; Linda Tewksbury, M.D.; Hawthorne Smith, Ph.D, Arthur Fierman, M.D.

Re: Oversight Hearing on The Experiences of Black Migrants in the City; City Council Bills Intro 84, Intro 85, Intro 739, Resolution 340

We write in support of proposed New York City Council Bills- Intro 84, Intro 85, Intro 739, and Resolution 340, which call for oversight by the City Council of services and outcomes provided to recently arriving asylum seekers. Importantly, these bills propose ongoing collection of demographic and outcomes data by several city government departments regarding recently arriving asylum seekers and regular reporting to the City Council. We believe such monitoring and oversight will help to ensure the needs of this highly vulnerable population of recently arrived New Yorkers are being addressed to the greatest extent possible.

We are a group of five concerned clinicians working in New York City with decades of experience caring for patients seeking asylum in NYC. Being on the frontlines of healthcare in the city, we have within the last year cared for and advocated on behalf of over 1,000 newly arrived people. This includes single adults as well as families with small children from over 50 countries, who endured torture, persecution, violence. Each day, we listen to the harrowing narratives of each of our patients, narratives that include violence in the home countries they fled and the dangers they have encountered along the journey to the United States. We know from these one-on-one conversations that the recently arrived individuals and families we care for have fled their home countries, and come to the United States not simply because they wanted to, but because they had no choice. It was and remains a matter of life and death.

Many of the newly arrived individuals and families we care for often express deep and profound gratitude for the life-saving services and support they have received from our city. We are proud to be part of this historic effort. However, we also know about the deeply challenging day-to-day lives of our newly arrived patients and feel compelled to advocate today. These narratives not uncommonly include traumatic moments which have led to a broad range of negative impacts such as worsening of underlying chronic health conditions because of limited access to storage methods for medications, suboptimal childhood growth and development due to inadequate nutrition and difficulty obtaining specialized services, unstable personal financing because of limited employment options, and long-term challenges to overall livelihood.

This hearing's focus on the Black migrant community highlights the urgency and importance of: understanding the inequities within the recently arrived communities' experiences, and implementing urgent real-time changes to reduce these inequities. Data gathering through these bills presented would likely provide essential background to support the narratives we are seeing, but our hope is that there will also be more immediate attempts to minimize the preventable harms that were listed above. For example, the difficulty in accessing updated and accurate information about housing and legal processes in the preferred language can, in a cumulative way, be retraumatizing, often worsening underlying mental health diagnoses. We recall a Senegalese patient and their family who noted that when trying to request case management services in their preferred language of French, they were told that would not be possible, with our patient noting the feeling of "not being seen" and how this imprinted a feeling that "they do not exist" and worrying that "we may not be accepted here." Having access to essential information regarding housing, case management, and legal care within each person's preferred language would not only limit the preventable harms listed earlier, but also demonstrate that we as a New York City community are interested and invested in welcoming newly arrived people equally.

We believe that these four bills will support further data gathering that will be only beneficial to the overall future well-being of our patients and all newly arriving people to the city. Your consideration and leadership on these matters is imperative and greatly appreciated for the continued betterment of our community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹⁴ Dr. Ramasamy is an Attending Physician in Primary Care; Dr. Keller is an Attending Physician in Primary Care and Population Health; Dr. Tewksbury is an Attending Physician in Pediatrics; Dr. Smith is a Licensed Psychologist in Behavioral Health; Dr. Fierman is an Attending Physician in Pediatrics. The opinions expressed here are those of Drs. Ramasamy, Keller, Tewksbury, Smith, and Dr. Fierman and are not made on behalf of the institutions with which they are affiliated.

Good Morning (or Afternoon)

Today, I stand before you with my story—a journey from uncertainty to hope. My name is Souleiman and I am 21 years old. I'm here to share with you a glimpse into my life as a young migrant who found refuge in the United States, and at Covenant House.

Leaving my homeland in West Africa was not a choice I made lightly. I love my country. I cherish my family and the life I had built. Yet, staying there was no longer safe for me. In my country, being black meant living under constant fear—fear of persecution, violence, being stripped of dignity and basic human rights.

The journey to the United States was long. I traveled by plane, by car, and by foot. It was exhausting, but I couldn't give up. Once I arrived in New York City, I stayed on the streets of Brooklyn, in adult shelters... wherever I could find to lay my head. Then I was able to get a bed at Covenant House where I found rest and could be at peace. Covenant House is not just shelter for me or the other kids that find rest there; it is a place that gives us hope. Not only did I find a roof over my head, I found a community that is like a family.

Once I got to Covenant House, my worries of survival could be set aside. My focus shifted from just existence to beginning this next phase of my life. I found the support I needed to pursue my education, to engage in the IT Career Pathways Program, and to dream of a future where my skills and talents could lead me to starting my own businesses.

But beyond a place to lay my head and programs, Covenant House offered something invaluable—dignity. In a new world where I was being overlooked, Covenant House reminded me of my worth.

My story is not the only one of its kind. There are countless young people like me, in search of safety and opportunity. It is for all of us that I pray you think about the importance of places like Covenant House in our lives.

As policymakers, you hold the power to shape the future—to create a world where every young person, regardless of their background or circumstances, can have an opportunity to thrive. To do that we do need additional support. All we want is to live a life with dignity. Where we are respected as all young people deserve. In order to do that we need additional legal support. I found an attorney through Covenant House but so many of my friends do not have such luck. We also need educational opportunities, language access and classes so that we can be prepared when we the opportunity to work after filing for asylum.

I am more than a statistic. I am a human being that deserves a fair shot at a good life. And I am here to advocate for myself, and my peers, who look to Covenant House for help. I hope you that you will continue standing up for us, and supporting the rights and dignity of all young people experiencing homelessness.

Thank you for your time.

My name is Virginia Marshall and I am a community member in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn. For the past several months, I have been organizing with my neighbors to support the influx of migrants to the shelter on Hall Street. Initially, they were all single men, mostly from African countries. After the family shelter opened up in our neighborhood months later, myself and my neighbors continued to fill the holes of direct services and emergency needs through grassroots mobilization and mutual aid work.

I am writing today about the lack of holistic social services and case management afforded Black asylum seeker migrants - specifically those from the continent of Africa and Haiti – in a moment where our new neighbors are escaping the ruins of colonialism, civil war, and capitalist extraction. They are here to seek a better livelihood, but also to save their life. It is common knowledge that the majority of Black asylum seekers have yet to be able to secure legal representation and process their asylum paperwork. Every day, the number of those who have missed their deadline to apply for asylum increases. Many are at a standstill, unemployed and are facing homelessness, we demand for the city stop neglecting Black migrants.

1. We demand for the city to hold itself and CBO's (Community Based Organizations) accountable to Black migrant asylum seekers. Every CBO or New York Immigration council satellite site that has been allocated funding to assist asylum seekers should receive and provide case management to everyone, including Black African and Afro Caribbean migrants.
2. We demand the city stop allocating state and federal funding meant for asylum seeker services to private corporations. Over 500 million dollars was made available for this manufactured crisis by the city and asylum seekers are in a worse condition than 2022. That funding should be used to increase city employment. This would increase the number of social workers, expand housing services, and invest in public education workers to meet the current needs of all New Yorkers including our new Black migrant community.
3. We demand for the city to provide city materials in languages accessible to the new African migrant community. City notices and CBO workforce development programs, like OSHA or even ESL classes, are not provided in languages that are understood by our newcomers. This limit is xenophobic and racist. Our new Black migrant community members are not a monolith and do not share a single story. Every asylum seeker' needs must be individualized, respected and considered with care.
4. We demand holistic case management- including support, processing and filing I-589s, access to health care, expedited residency status at shelter sites, access to IDNYC without appointments and guaranteed access to livable shelter.
5. We demand for the city to financially support Black led; Black immigrant grassroots organizations that have been proven to offer efficient case management to asylum seekers only. We demand for the city to encourage and support more African service organizations to work in Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island. Every respite center and family shelter should be assigned to a community-centered grassroots organization that can offer culturally specific human centered case management for all asylum seekers- including Black African and Afro-Caribbean migrants.

Thank you for reading my testimony.

Sincerely,

Virginia Marshall

Resident of Clinton Hill, Brooklyn and mutual aid volunteer

Hello,

As a proud NY resident I am writing to demand that all immigration services and resources be improved to adequately and significantly meet the needs of African and Black immigrants who are experiencing disproportionate discrimination and racism in accessing available immigration aid and resources.

To the city council,



My name is Zara Farooq, i'm 16 years old and live in The Bronx.

Im writing to pass 0084-2024 into two 0085-2024 and T2024-0932.

I think NYC needs to support migrants and asylum seekers because essentially, welcoming migrants into NYC benefits us. Immigrants are more likely to be starting businesses and contribute billions of dollars to the NYC economy.

In my own experience, I have had family members come to NY and stay for around 10 years. ~~He~~ He got married and had a kid and still wasn't able to get his papers. ~~He~~ All this time he was working as well. Asylum seekers deserve the right to live ~~their~~ life without fear of losing everything they know.

This is why ~~NYC~~ NYS should ~~approve~~ approve these bills.

English
French

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mamanda Mary Cicello

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: Mamanda Mary Cicello @ gmail

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Bongaly Camara

Address: Brooklyn

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Taberou Barry

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

French

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Thierno Sandrine Diallo

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Français
French

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Amadou Diallo

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: April 16, 2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mamadou Bello Bah Français

Address: [Redacted] W. 158 St [Redacted]

I represent: African guinean

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DJIBRIL DIOUF

Address: _____ BRONX, NY 10462

I represent: ABISA

Address: 71 E 117th ST, NEW YORK, NY 10029

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mamadou ouss Diallo

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Abdourahame Diallo

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Seidu Hamidu

Address: _____

I represent: La Colmena

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0084 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Olivia Veazey

Address: _____ Brooklyn, NY 11225

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: April 16/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mamdou Toupe

Address: Shelter 44

I represent: ABISA

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: April 18th

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Diallo Fatimata

Address: Shelton - 57th ave

I represent: ABISA

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Fatimataou Balde

Address: Shelton 148th

I represent: ABISA

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 4/16/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Abdulmajeed Ishag

Address: _____

I represent: with the Legal Aid Society Deborah Lee

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Iesha Sekou (SAYCOO)

Address: [REDACTED] W 145th St

I represent: Community Street
Address: corner Reservoir

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ASIE SAINT LOUIS

Address: 197-17 Hillside Ave

I represent: Haitian Americans United
Address: For Progress

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

Date: 4/16/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Henry Love

Address: _____

I represent: Win Inc

Address: 1 State Street

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sergio Uzurin

Address: Brooklyn

I represent: NYC ICE WATCH / Migrant Mutual Aid

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Maribel Acosta

Address: _____

I represent: Bushwick City Farm /

Address: GC Migrant Solidarity

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ninaj Raoul

Address: [Redacted] Clarendon Rd.

I represent: Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees

Address: [Redacted] Clarendon Rd., Brooklyn, NY 11238

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 04/16/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SYED AHMED (MAHDI)

Address: _____

I represent: HALAL FOOD STANDARDS ALLIANCE OF AMERICA

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 04/16/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MELISSA JOHNSON

Address: _____

I represent: BLACK ALLIANCE FOR JUST IMMIGRATION (BAJI)

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/16/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Maira Shoush

Address: _____ New York, NY 10025

I represent: _____

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0084-2074 Res. No. 0340-2024
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DAMIAN HARRIS-HERNANDEZ

Address: _____ BROOKLYN 11238

I represent: REFUGEE TRANSLATION PROJECT

Address: 367 SAINT MARKS AVE STE 49 BROOKLYN 11238

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: APR 16/14

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dr. Seydi San

Address: _____ Belmont Ave

I represent: ABISA

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Balde Abdoulaye

Address: _____ B, N.Y., 10010

I represent: _____

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MAMADOU SAHIBU DIAZLO

Address: _____ Brooklyn

I represent: GUINEAN Community

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: DIQUE DJIBRIL

Address: _____ BRONX NY

I represent: ABTSA

Address: 115 TR ST NEW YORK, NY 10029

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 4/16/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nneka Okefora

Address: _____ Brooklyn NY 1015

I represent: Immigrant ARC

Address: 157 13th St. Brooklyn, NY 11215

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Fatoumata Batauly Diallo

Address: _____

I represent: African Communities Together

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Abdoul Gadiri

Address: _____

I represent: African Communities Together

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ADAMA BAI

Address: _____ Box NY

I represent: Afrika

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Maimouna Dieye

Address: _____

I represent: African Communities Together

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tom Tortorici

Address: Exec Director of Legal Support

I represent: Initiatives - Mayor's Office

Address: of Immigrant Affairs

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aissata Camara

Address: Deputy Commissioner / Chief of

I represent: Staff, Mayor's Office of

Address: International Affairs

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: PATRICE LAWRENCE

Address: [REDACTED] Road, Forest Hills NY 11375

I represent: UndocuBlack Network

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Amaha Kassa

Address: _____

I represent: African Communities Together

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Julio Herrera

Address: 470 Vanderbilt Ave, Brooklyn, NY

I represent: The Black Institute

Address: 470 Vanderbilt Ave

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT) Commissioner

Name: Manuel Castro, [redacted]

Address: Mayor's Office

I represent: of Immigrant Affairs

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Molly Schaeffer,

Address: Director Office of

I represent: Asylum Seeker Operations

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Arielle Wisbaum

Address: _____

I represent: New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

Address: [redacted]

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

Date: 04/16/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ZEINAB. EYEGA

Address: 841 Barretto St. Suite B312, Bx, NY 10474

I represent: SAUTI YETU CTR FOR AFRICAN WOMEN

Address: 841 Barretto St. Ste. B312, Bx, NY 10474

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

Date: 4/16/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rex Chen

Address: _____

I represent: Legal Services NYC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Souleiman Ba

Address: _____ 10461

I represent: Courmant House

Address: 460 W. 41st 10036

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JENNIFER JARRELL

Address: 460 W. 41ST STREET NY NY 10036

I represent: COVENANT HOUSE

Address: 460 W. 41ST NY NY 10036

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 4/16/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ellenor Rutkey

Address: 555 Broome St, New York, NY 10068

I represent: The Down Legal Services Center

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: James Hendon

Address: _____

I represent: DVS

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0085 Res. No. 2024A
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Monica Tulchinsky

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn NY 11230

I represent: NYLAG - Legal Health dept.

Address: 100 Pearl St Floor 19 NY NY 10004

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 4/16/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ~~R~~ REX CHEN

Address: 40 WORTH ST #606 NYC 10013

I represent: LEGAL SERVICES NYC

Address: 40 WORTH ST #606 NY NY 10013

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 4/16/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jamie Powlovich

Address: 495 Flatbush Ave, suite 10 Brooklyn

I represent: Coalition For Homeless Youth 11225

Address: Same

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Corine Umbano - Golden
Address: [REDACTED] Bronx, NY 10453
I represent: Africa is Everywhere / BAMBA
Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 7/16/2024

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Connie Ticho
Address: 40 Rector St. NY, NY
I represent: Urban Justice Center, Free to be Tuth
Project
Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 4/16/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sebastian Vank
Address: 209 West 125th Street
I represent: Safe Haven - Streetbank project
Address: 209 West 125th Street NY, NY

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

(2) of 2

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sandra Dieudonné

Address: _____

I represent: Catholic Charities - Haitian Response Initiative

Address: Immigrant and Refugee Services

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

(1) of 2

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lauren Wyatt

Address: _____

I represent: Catholic Charities - Justice Initiatives

Address: Immigrant and Refugee Services

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms