

TESTIMONY

BEFORE

THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
COMMITTEES ON YOUTH SERVICES AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

HEARING

ON

FEDERAL COMMUNITY SERVICES BLOCK GRANT PROGRAM

PRESENTED BY  
SUZANNE LYNN  
DEPUTY COMMISSIONER

NEW YORK CITY  
DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT  
FRIDAY, JUNE 22, 2012

Good morning, Chairs Fidler and Vann and members of the Youth Services and Community Development Committees. I am Suzanne Lynn, Deputy Commissioner for the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development. On behalf of Commissioner Jeanne B. Mullgrav, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the City's use of its \$30.9 million from Community Services Block Grant funding to provide services for the most vulnerable New Yorkers. Through these funds, DYCD aims to reduce poverty and empower people to achieve self-sufficiency in 43 low-income neighborhoods throughout the City's five boroughs. CSBG supports 200 community-based organizations serving 30,000 low-income New Yorkers.

### **Immigrant Services**

In our city, where almost 40% of our population was born outside the United States, DYCD plays a vital role in serving immigrant New Yorkers and their families. DYCD strategically invests CSBG funds to support a holistic, family focused-approach to assist immigrants in meeting the challenges of adapting to unfamiliar surroundings. CSBG is one of very few federal funding streams that are available for immigrant services, so its preservation is crucial to DYCD's Immigrant Services Initiative.

DYCD, through its Immigrant Services Initiative provides CSBG funding to community-based organizations with 20 contracts totaling \$2.68 million to serve almost 3,000 immigrants. The initiative includes five program areas:

- **Legal Services for Immigrant Youth** help undocumented youth in foster care, and unaccompanied immigrant youth obtain legal status through the attainment of Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. DYCD expanded services last year to include attainment of other legal immigration status, such as U or T visas. Providers also now provide case management services to address participants' needs for housing, education, health and mental health care and other social services and benefits.
- **Legal Services for Immigrants** assist immigrant adults and youth attain citizenship and lawful immigration status, according them greater access to benefits and services. DYCD has enhanced services in order to provide additional types of legal representation and social service assistance.
- **Services for Victims of Domestic Violence and Trafficking** provide domestic violence prevention services to immigrant victims, and help them attain lawful immigration status. We have expanded the program to serve victims of trafficking and domestic violence victims in same-sex relationships.
- **Services for Immigrant Families** has been re-focused on immigrant families with children in Middle School or High School, since parents of English Language Learners have a more difficult time supporting their children's education. The program works with immigrant families to teach them about the school system and foster their involvement in their children's education. It also helps participating students remain enrolled in and attend school on a regular basis, in accordance with school expectations.

- **Services for Immigrant Workers** is a new service area to address concerns about exploitation of low-wage immigrant workers. All workers, regardless of their status, have the right to be paid minimum wage and work in safe conditions. This program educates immigrants on their employment rights, and provides advocacy and legal services to address employment rights.

CSBG funds provide a strong foundation to leverage the Council's \$3.66 million Immigrant Opportunities Initiative. Combined, it represents a large portion of funding dedicated to help immigrants meet the challenges of establishing themselves in the City.

### Literacy Services

Similarly, DYCD invested a blend of Federal, City tax levy and Council funding totaling \$9.8 million to serve over 7,545 young people and adults in literacy programs. Over one-quarter of the total funding, \$2.55 million, is from CSBG.

- **Adolescent Literacy** after school programs use a range of educational approaches to help struggling 6th, 7th and 8th graders develop their reading, writing, and oral communication skills to ensure that they stay in school and are prepared for high school. This program's success is rooted in collaborative relationships with parents, principals and teachers and the CUNY Creative Art Team, which provides technical assistance. The program is supported by \$1 million in CSBG funds.
- **Adult Literacy** program participants attain the reading, writing and communication skills they want and need to gain employment or pursue further education. Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs provide instruction in reading, writing and mathematics to native English or English-fluent speakers and GED programs prepare students for the tests required for a high school equivalency diploma. English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes help students to improve their English language communication skills. Working Adult Literacy students benefit in the workplace too. For example, in Fiscal Year 2011, out of 1,735 working student program participants, 781 obtained their jobs through the program and 206 were granted raises. The program receives \$1.55 million in CSBG funds.

### Fatherhood Initiative

Another innovative city-wide initiative supported by CSBG is DYCD's Fatherhood program, which encourages fathers to become personally involved with their children and helps them to relate to their co-parents. The Fatherhood Initiative was established in 2002 in recognition of the positive influence that fathers have on their children. Children who have strong relationships with their fathers are far less likely to get in trouble at home, school or the community. An active and nurturing style of fathering is also associated with better verbal skills and academic achievement among young people. Fathers also benefit from positive, healthy, and supportive relationships with their children.

Many non-custodial fathers face challenges in establishing close relationships with their children, and in providing support for them. The Fatherhood Initiative targeted three distinct groups: young fathers, older fathers and fathers with prior involvement in the criminal justice system, to promote their involvement with and economic support for their children.

The program's \$3 million budget supports 11 contracts with various and diverse community-based organizations which specialize in disconnected youth, foster care youth, working with the formerly incarcerated, and workforce development. These programs are located in targeted community districts with a high need for fatherhood services based on the number of children born to unmarried women, and the number of individuals on probation.

Another way we help fathers reconnect with their children is by creating opportunities for new experiences. For example, last Saturday, DYCD held its annual Father's Day Celebration at the New York Aquarium. Over 160 dads and children attended and explored nature and learned together. They also participated in an interactive workshop about the role of parents in the animal kingdom with Aquarium favorites penguins and sea lions. Additionally, last month dads and children participated in Mother's Recognition Day events at Cornerstone Programs in NYCHA facilities, where they created artwork together to present as gifts on Mother's Day.

### **Summer Youth Employment Program**

Additionally, \$1.6 million from CSBG supports 1,100 jobs for young people through the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). These funds are particularly necessary given the 132,500 youth have applied for SYEP. Combined with other funding sources including the City's investment of \$20 million, the State's commitment of \$13.5 million and the Mayor's third annual public-private partnership campaign, we estimate that we may serve 29,000 youth.

### **Neighborhood Development Area Initiative**

The other half, \$16 million, is invested in the NDA Initiative, which fosters community-level engagement and provides residents with opportunities to contribute to change in their neighborhoods. Through resident input, and the community's identification of priorities, NDA targets services to the most pressing needs of each community. They are provided through contracts with approximately 200 organizations and serve residents of 43 low-income communities throughout the City.

- **Middle-School Youth: Educational Support and Leadership** provides creative approaches to educational support, leadership and life skills development to youth in the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. The intention is to assist students and to ensure successful completion of high school.
- **High School-Aged Youth: Educational Support and Employment** helps high school students at risk of dropping out develop academic, personal, and workplace skills necessary to obtain high school diplomas.

- **Adult Literacy: Adult Basic Education (ABE) and General Education Development (GED) Tests Preparation** provides instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics to prepare adults in attaining their GED, and transitioning into the labor force, vocational training or higher education.
- **Seniors: Social, Cultural, and Supportive Services** assist homebound and non-homebound older adults to maintain the highest degree of self-sufficiency and social engagement so they can remain in their homes.
- **Housing: Advocacy and Assistance** helps individuals and families facing foreclosure, eviction, rent issues, or substandard housing conditions.
- **Immigrants: Support Services** provides immigrants and their children with the tools and resources to become self-sufficient, to navigate the system, and to obtain permanent residency or citizenship. This allows people to strengthen their families and improve their living conditions.
- **Healthy Families: Support Services** works with families to address issues concerning domestic violence, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, and health and nutrition. This includes advocacy and assistance in obtaining government benefits and other social services.

## Conclusion

As this demonstrates, CSBG is incredibly important to the City in serving the unique needs of New Yorkers through a variety of innovative local and citywide programs. We thank the Council for holding this hearing, especially given the President's budget proposal for Federal Fiscal Year 2013 again proposes to cut CSBG in half to only \$350 million. Further, it includes a proposal to allocate the remaining funding through a competitive process, instead of the existing formula allocation that considers both needs and population. Last month, we concluded a series of five Borough meetings concerning CSBG. The meetings highlighted our strategic use of CSBG to support 200 community-based organizations serving 30,000 low-income New Yorkers. During these meetings, we heard moving testimonies from many whose lives have been improved by these programs, such as a senior who was able to stay in her home, an immigrant who learned English, a young adult who received her GED, and fathers taking responsibility for their children.

I'd like to share the story of one young woman who has benefited from a CSBG-supported program. Nineteen-year-old Melina arrived in the United States from the Dominican Republic on Christmas Day 2011, joining her mother and two brothers in the Bronx. Melina enrolled in ESOL classes at SOBRO within weeks of her arrival. It was quickly apparent that Melina was a very bright, committed, and conscientious young woman who completed her assignments before others, yet she was hesitant to participate in class. As she gained confidence in her ability to learn the English language, Melina began to involve herself more in classroom activities. In May of this year, Melina successfully completed Home Health Aide training and will soon be working, but her aspirations do not end there. She has enrolled in the CLIP program

at Bronx Community College where she hopes to pursue a degree in accounting. Her dream also includes helping her family financially and becoming an American citizen.

We appreciate the efforts of the many advocacy and community-based organizations that have spearheaded these important forums to educate the public and policy makers on the importance of CSBG funding to people like Melina.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss DYCD's efforts to serve New York's low-income individuals, families, and communities. I am accompanied today by Assistant Commissioner Cindy Colter. We are pleased to answer any questions or address any comments that you may have.

**FOR THE RECORD**

# **P.O.M.O.C., Inc.**

**Polonians Organized to Minister to Our Community, Inc.**  
Not-for-profit human services agency

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL HEARING**  
**on Proposed Res. No. 687-A, calling on the New York City**  
**Congressional Delegation and President Barack Obama to**  
**prevent cuts to the Community Services Block Grant Program**

June 22, 2012

To: **Members of the New York City Committee on Youth Services and  
Committee on Community Development**

Polonians Organized to Minister to Our Community, Inc. is a non-profit human service agency with a mission to improve the quality of life for those in need. Since 1981 the organization has been the recipient of Federal, State and City funding for the purpose of providing assistance to the low-income communities of New York City.

In 2011 our Queens Program assisted approximately 3,500 clients with a variety of social, healthcare related and legal immigration services.

One of our programs, Healthy Families, is funded by CSBG and base-lined through the NYC Department of Youth and Community Development. The Health Families program is targeted to low-income residents of the Ridgewood section of Queens, particularly immigrants. Our target population of low-income immigrant families consists of a large number of residents, who arrive in the United States with little or no language skills and very limited resources. Our clients need guidance and concrete assistance in stabilizing their living conditions and moving closer to self-sufficiency.

The Healthy Families Program is designed to strengthen families, as well as provide them with a network of support services. Our agency firmly believes that by applying a holistic approach to our clients needs, we stand a better chance of providing them with the right tools and knowledge necessary to survive in today's harsh reality.

The program provides information, referral and one-on-one assistance in areas such as: entitlement programs, employment, housing, education, immigration assistance, tax assistance, senior services, transportation and emergency assistance.

Many immigrants with very limited English language skills, regardless of their age, experience on a regular basis, difficulties with access to government programs, entitlements and managed healthcare due to lack of information and communication barriers.

Our direct services, provided in their own environment and often in their own language, help people receive much needed benefits such as Medicaid, SSI and Food Stamps.

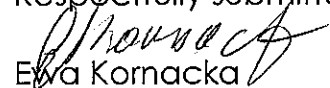
Due to severe cuts in the New York City budgets for fiscal year 2011 and 2012, our organization had lost a substantial amount of City funding which was an essential part of our operating budget. Currently POMOC is still struggling to keep our office sites open and continue assisting clients.

At the same time the economic downturn has disproportionately affected low-income families, particularly immigrants. Our clients are in greater need than ever of free of charge, professional assistance from community based organizations like ours. In many cases we are their only resource for help and assistance in these turbulent times.

In light of the proposed cuts to the CSBG funding for the next Federal fiscal year we would like to add our voice against the President's recently released budget. We cannot stress enough the importance of CSBG funding as a crucial part of New York City's social safety net.

On behalf of Polonians Organized to Minister to Our Community, Inc. and the immigrant population we serve,

Respectfully submitted



Ewa Kornacka

Executive Director  
Polonians Organized to Minister to Our Community, Inc.





**Testimony of the Save CSBG NYC Coalition  
Presented to the NYC Council Youth Committee  
In Support of Resolution Calling on the NYC Congressional Delegation and President Obama to prevent cuts  
to the Community Services Block Grant Program  
June 22, 2012**

This testimony is being submitted on behalf of the members of the Save CSBG NYC Coalition. The Coalition is comprised of advocacy groups and community-based organizations throughout the City, including the Human Services Council (HSC), UJA-Federation of New York, United Neighborhood Houses (UNH), and the Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA). Together we have been advocating for the continued funding of the Community Services Block Grant (CSBG), which support anti-poverty initiatives throughout the City.

We would like to thank Council Member Lew Fidler, Chair of the Youth Services Committee, and Council Member Al Vann, Chair of the Community Development Committee, for their consideration of the resolution and for the opportunity to testify in support of the resolution for New York City’s Congressional Delegation and the President to restore CSBG funding.

Throughout April and May, the Coalition hosted a series of borough-wide meetings with community-based organizations including Queens Community House, Children’s Aid Society, Project Hospitality, SOBRO, and Make the Road NY with the goal of informing New Yorkers of the White House’s proposal to cut CSBG funding. CSBG is the longest standing stream of federal funding to alleviate poverty nationwide. It provides flexible funding to states to support a broad range of community-based programs that are designed to combat poverty, empower people to achieve self-sufficiency, and revitalize low-income communities.

The Obama Administration has proposed a 50% cut to CSBG funding for fiscal year 2013. If this cut is realized, New York City stands to lose up to \$31.9 million in critical program funding because of the proposed reduction combined with the move to a non-formulary distribution. Last year, the Administration proposed \$350 million in cuts to CSBG for the current federal fiscal year, which also represents a 50% cut from fiscal year 2012 level funding. The CSBG cut was exacerbated by the debt ceiling debate. The ongoing debate stalled negotiations on CSBG and could have resulted in serious ramifications for the program. But, through the efforts of the New York City Coalition to Save CSBG and other similar coalitions nationwide, we were successful in maintaining funding in the amount of \$677 million.

As you may know, the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) administers the Federal CSBG program to fund anti-poverty initiatives throughout the City. Funding supports programs such as:

- |                            |  |
|----------------------------|--|
| Adult Literacy             | Healthy Families                                     |
| Immigrant Support Services | Support for High School and Middle School Aged Youth |
| The Fatherhood Initiative  | Senior Services                                      |
| Adolescent Literacy        | Housing Assistance and Advocacy                      |

In 2012, DYCD allocated CSBG funding to the above-mentioned community-based programs. CSBG funding for FY13 is more critical than ever as many programs such as child care, afterschool and adult literacy are facing significant reductions in the City budget. Mayor Bloomberg has proposed to drastically reduce funding and slots for after-school and early childhood education programs. Families citywide rely on these programs to provide safe spaces for their

children while they are working. These programs help them maintain continued employment. A recent survey conducted by the Campaign for Children found that 50% of parents with a child in a child care program would quit their job if subsidized or free care was not available. More disturbingly, 16% of parents surveyed with children in afterschool programs would leave their child home, unsupervised if a program was unavailable. With over \$170 million and 47,000 slots slated to be cut from City-funded child care and afterschool programs; CSBG funding is needed more than ever. CSBG programs, such as afterschool initiatives, are a critical piece of the City's safety net.

In line with its mission to alleviate poverty and empower individuals, CSBG funding is especially critical for adult literacy services provided within New York City. In fact, in FY 2012, DYCD's adult literacy RFP consisted entirely of \$2 million in federal funding, with nearly \$500,000, or 25% of the allocation comprised of CSBG funding. Federal funding stood as the sole source of DYCD's adult literacy programming until the City Council acted to restore \$1,000,000 in City Tax Levy (CTL) funding.

Adult Basic Education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and GED preparation are vital components of the City's strategy to develop a skilled workforce and engaged citizenry. Currently, New York City is home to a staggering 1.2 million people currently out of school and without high school credentials. Adult literacy programs have the power to increase their median wages, and the city's tax base, with 2012 Census data revealing that those who obtain a high school diploma or GED earn 25% more than those without a credential. Adult literacy is also invaluable for the City's children given the fact that parental education levels and engagement with teachers are the strongest indicator of whether or not a child will be raised in poverty and succeed in school. Unfortunately, the Mayor's FY 2013 Executive Budget contains no City funding for DYCD's adult literacy programs, which again magnifies the importance of federal CSBG funding provided to disadvantaged NYC communities.

By providing critical services to our most vulnerable populations, CSBG enables New Yorkers to overcome poverty and social immobility. CSBG is a lifeline for over 30,000 New York families: 1,350 men participate in fatherhood programs; 5,500 youth are enrolled in education support systems; 5,700 immigrants receive citizenship education. It is critical that we continue to provide adequate funding for the CSBG program, especially in tough economic times.

Now, more than ever, New York's youth and adults need to have access to further education, our seniors need safe and appropriate housing, and our families need substance abuse and HIV/AIDS support services. Eliminating CSBG funds takes away from those who cannot afford to lose our help. It strips our citizens of the tools they need to be economically, socially, and politically independent. CSBG's education, job training, health care, and housing services are vital to ensure the success of our low-income, elderly, and student communities

While the importance of CSBG is undeniable to the aforementioned programs in our City, and the Save CSBG Coalition strongly supports the City Council in calling on the New York State Congressional Delegation and the President to preserve this funding, it is important to note that the City should always seek first to make appropriate investments in serving its vulnerable populations.. The Coalition commends the Council for acting to safeguard this crucial funding and looks forward to the Council's continued leadership in restoring the base City funding upon which CSBG is layered.

**Leroy Comrie**  
Council Member 27<sup>th</sup> C.D.  
*Deputy Majority Leader*

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**FOR THE RECORD**

June 22, 2012

Community Service Block Grants are a critical source of funding for New York City. So many of our programs aimed at lifting families out of poverty and revitalizing communities depend on this critical federal funding stream. Yet, at a time when poverty in New York City is at an all-time high, when we are in one of our highest points of unemployment, the federal government is considering reducing these funds.

According to the Center for Economic Opportunity, the number of New Yorker's living in poverty is now at 21 percent<sup>1</sup>, the highest percentage since 2005. With minorities having the highest percentage of those living in poverty, reports show that these numbers could have been worse without these government programs. Couple this with an unemployment rate in New York City of 9.6 percent<sup>2</sup> and it is clear that these resources are needed now more than ever. CSBG has significantly helped communities throughout the city by funding after school and child care programs.

In last year's fiscal budget, the federal government reduced these funds by half and the same bleak outlook is forecasted for this fiscal year. It is because of these cuts to CSBG that we are here now in the budget trying to restore as many of the programs as we can.

The resolution being heard today is a strong statement from the City Council to Congress and the President that the restoration of these funds are a major priority. Thank you Chairs Vann, Fidler and members of the committee, I look forward to your continued support.

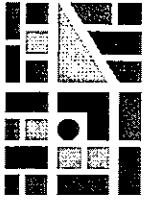
Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Leroy Comrie".

Leroy Comrie  
Council Member, 27<sup>th</sup> District, Queens

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/17/nyregion/new-york-citys-poverty-rate-reaches-highest-level-since-2005.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/17/nyregion/new-york-citys-poverty-rate-reaches-highest-level-since-2005.html?_r=2)

<sup>2</sup> <http://labor.ny.gov/stats/pressreleases/prlaus.shtm>



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**HEARING OF THE COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES  
NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL  
June 22, 2012, 10:00 a.m.**

**RE: Proposed Res. No. 687-A**

Good morning, my name is Aaron Halegua and I am a Staff Attorney for the Employment Law Unit at The Legal Aid Society.

I am here to speak in favor of the proposed resolution calling on the New York City Congressional Delegation and President Barack Obama to prevent cuts to the Community Services Block Grant Program.

The Legal Aid Society is a not-for-profit public interest law firm that delivers the full range of legal services to low-income individuals in New York City. The Society has local neighborhood offices in all five boroughs of New York City, along with centralized city-wide law reform, employment law, immigration law, health law, and homeless rights practices. Funds from the Community Services Block Grant Program have been instrumental in allowing the Society to provide legal advice, advocacy and representation to countless New York City residents who desperately need the assistance. In particular, the Society's Employment Law and Immigration Law Units have benefited from such funds. Today, I will describe the critical services that these Units perform for City residents; services that would be placed in jeopardy without this federal funding.

#### The Employment Law Unit

The Employment Law Unit provides representation, community education, and advice to low-wage workers regarding employment issues, including: unemployment insurance benefits; minimum wage, overtime and other wage and hour issues; employment discrimination based on race, national origin, gender or other protected categories, based on a person's criminal record or due to a person's medical or family responsibilities issues; and retaliation against whistleblowers or others who complain about unfair or illegal practices at their workplace.

The Employment Law Unit, with one supervising attorney, five staff attorneys and three paralegals serving the entire City, directly helps thousands of New Yorkers each year

by providing advice through its telephone hotline, conducting trainings and outreach at community groups throughout the City and providing in-person counseling. The Unit indirectly assists countless more City residents by providing information about employees' rights in the media, advocacy efforts to make government agencies more accessible to immigrants and those of limited English proficiency, and policy advocacy on behalf of low-wage workers.

While the Unit assists many individuals each year to settle claims against their employers without resorting to litigation, when necessary, the Unit also zealously represents workers – either as individual, groups or a class – before City, State or Federal administrative agencies and courts.

In one such case, the Unit recently received a significant verdict from a federal court Jury on behalf of six Chinese residents of Queens who worked for a chain of nail salons on Long Island. These workers were sometimes paid as little as \$20 or \$30 for a day in excess of ten hours. As is common in this industry, the owners never paid the workers a penny of overtime despite working over 60 or sometimes 70 hours in a week. In fact, when the New York State Department of Labor investigated the wage and hour practices of the salons in or about 2007, the owners did not start complying with the law, but fabricated records of the hours worked by employees and the wages paid to them. The Society sued on behalf of these six workers in December 2009 and, just two months later, the four workers who were still employed at the salon were all fired. The Society assisted the workers in obtaining unemployment benefits. We also assisted them in filing a retaliation claim at the National Labor Relations Board and, after a year, got three of the four workers reinstated. And, after over two years of litigation in federal court, tried the case before a jury that awarded the plaintiffs over \$160,000 for the minimum wage and overtime violations they suffered and over \$80,000 in lost earnings for those employees who were retaliated against. Once penalties and interest are included, the workers are expected to be awarded close to a half-million dollars. Coverage of the case in the English and Chinese media has been encouraging other workers who face similar, illegal employment situations to inquire about their rights and express interest in taking action.

The Employment Law Unit has also represented numerous domestic workers, who are often trafficked into the United States by their employers who then pay them far below the minimum wage. In one case, the Society and a pro bono firm serving as co-counsel, were able to resolve a lawsuit filed on behalf of two such domestic workers with one of the workers receiving over \$100,000 and the other receiving over \$70,000. The case included minimum wage and overtime claims based on the defendants' failure to pay the women the required minimum wage and overtime compensation. The women also had claims under the federal anti-trafficking law based on the defendants' conduct of bringing them to the United States for the purpose of exploiting their labor. The Employment Unit in conjunction with the Society's Immigration Law Unit is also representing these women in their petitions for T-Visas, which would provide the women with work permits and status to stay in this country.

### Immigration Law Unit

For several decades the Society has maintained a robust and reputable Immigration Law Unit based in the Civil Practice. The Immigration Law Unit is the only citywide provider of free comprehensive legal services to low-income immigrants in New York City and outlying counties. The Unit works collaboratively in all practice areas to serve the Society's diverse immigrant clients through an integrated service model. Unit staff represent immigrants before US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), before immigration judges in removal proceedings, in federal court on habeas corpus petitions and petitions for review, and on administrative and judicial appeals. The Unit also partners with 14 community-based organizations in New York City to provide application assistance, comprehensive advice and workshops to low-income immigrants. In 2011 the Unit provided direct legal representation and/or advice in over 4,200 client matters.

The Unit is composed of an attorney-in-charge, two supervising attorneys, twenty-two staff attorneys, five paralegals (four of whom are Board of Immigration Appeals accredited representatives) and a half-time social worker. The staff is committed to providing high-quality legal representation, comprehensive advice and educational training to immigrant clients and advocates. Partnerships with other not-for-profit organizations and coordination of a successful pro bono program that recruits, trains and mentors volunteer attorneys and law students enable the Unit to maximize resources to meet the increasing demand for representation.

#### *Cases Involving Immigrant Youth*

One initiative of the Immigration Law Unit is its Immigrant Youth Representation Project. This project provides representation and advocacy to immigrant youth who are not under the care of parents or a legal guardian or who are unaccompanied by a parent, guardian or adult in removal proceedings. The project provides advice and representation to youth to enable them to obtain Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), which is a path to permanent residency, and other immigration benefits; defends unaccompanied immigrant youth who are in removal proceedings; trains pro bono attorneys; and advocates for reform at the Administration for Children's Services (ACS).

In one such case, Youth Project staff secured adjustment of status for YD, a citizen of Uruguay. YD, who never knew her parents, was institutionalized in Uruguay. When she was six-years-old, a family member sent her to Queens to live with her older sister. YD's sister took good care of her and even met with Youth Project staff to explore legal status for her sister. When her older sister suddenly died of cancer, YD became homeless and eventually ended up in foster care. YD's Legal Aid Juvenile Rights Practice attorney referred her to the Youth Project. Staff worked diligently on her SIJS application and in January she received her lawful permanent residence.

Another representative matter involved SA, who was born in South Korea. She was brought to the United States by her parents. Her mother developed mental disabilities after a few years and was institutionalized in a mental health facility. Subsequently, her father

was arrested for beating SA and her siblings. SA endured these beatings while going to high school. She was removed from the home and placed in foster care. A foster care agency referred her to the Youth Project, who helped her secure the necessary services to cope with the domestic violence she endured. Staff also assisted her to file for SIJS. SA recently graduated from high school at the top of her class and received a full scholarship to MacCaulay Honors College, part of the CUNY program. SA received her lawful residence status last month.

GA, a citizen of Mexico, entered the United States without inspection in 2004 after his mother died and his father abandoned him. He lived briefly with his brother in Texas before traveling to New York. He found employment in a restaurant as a dish washer. At age 20 he had a serious accident on the job that resulted in a partial amputation of a finger. He was referred to the Youth Project by a family friend. Staff determined that GA was eligible for SIJS. A family friend who had assisted him after his accident to apply for workers compensation agreed to be his guardian. Staff assisted the family friend to file guardianship papers and obtain a special findings order from Family Court. Staff then applied for SIJS for GA and his application was granted two weeks before his 21st birthday. GA no longer has to worry about the possible risk of deportation to Mexico.

#### *Immigration Court Cases*

As mentioned above, the Youth Project also litigates in court on behalf of clients when necessary.

One client, PP, a citizen of Guinea, contacted the Youth Project following the Asylum Office's denial of her asylum application based on female genital mutilation. Her case was subsequently referred to the immigration court. Youth Project staff met PP at the Juvenile Docket. Her mother sent her to the US at age 16 to live with her maternal brother after PP's father relocated to France leaving the family in dire straits. The father had on occasion subjected the family to alcohol induced abuse. The staff determined that PP was eligible for SIJS if her uncle became her guardian. Staff met with PP's uncle and explained both the Family Court guardianship and SIJS processes. The uncle was willing to assist his niece and Youth Project staff assisted him to file the guardianship application in family court. Upon the granting of the petition, staff prepared and submitted PP's SIJS application. Staff also represented PP in immigration court and made a motion to terminate her case and refer her case to USCIS to adjudicate her SIJS application. PP graduated from high school last year and was recently granted adjustment of status. PP, now 20, is looking forward to going to college.

AH, a citizen of Honduras, was detained at the Mexican border when she attempted to enter the US at age 12 to reunite with her sick mother and father. She had been raised in Honduras by her aunt. A month after she was released to her parents by immigration officials, AH's mother died. After AH was released to her parents, immigration officials also initiated removal proceedings against her. When her father became depressed and hostile, AH's older sister obtained a family court joint custody order with AH's father. AH's case was pending in immigration court for years because her prior representative

failed to file any viable applications for relief on her behalf. After interviewing AH, Legal Aid staff determined that she was eligible for SIJS because she could not reunite with one parent, her deceased mother. Her sister was willing to become her guardian and the Legal Aid Youth Project successfully petitioned the family court for a special findings order. Staff also filed the SIJS application with USCIS and then moved to terminate her immigration court case. The immigration court granted the motion and AH's SIJS application is now pending approval.

Another matter involved MA, who was referred to the Youth Project by a legal services provider. He was detained by immigration officials at the border while attempting to enter the United States. He was subsequently released to his brother in New York and immigration officials commenced removal proceedings to deport him. He was initially represented by an attorney who went out of business. His second attorney was disbarred. When Legal Aid Youth Staff met MA, he had a pending merits hearing on an asylum claim in immigration court based on fear of gangs, a very difficult asylum claim because people who fear recruitment into gangs are not deemed to be a recognizable social group for asylum purposes.

After interviewing MA and his brother, Youth staff determined that he was eligible for SIJS if his brother obtained guardianship. The brother was unwilling to become MA's guardian and for months MA's immigration case was in limbo. A month before MA turned 21, Youth staff found out that he had a transgender aunt who was actively involved in his life and very supportive of MA. Because of the uncommon gender issue, the family court initially rejected her guardianship petition. Legal Aid Youth Project staff collaborated with other legal services organizations and social workers who provided extensive investigation reports of MA's home and his aunt's home. The family court eventually granted the petition and the Project filed his SIJS application and made a motion to terminate his case, which was granted. MA's adjustment application is pending before USCIS.

\* \* \*

The above cases are designed to provide a sample of the types of critical work that the Society's Employment Law Unit and Immigration Law Unit performs on behalf low-income City residents, the vast majority of whom cannot find adequate legal advice and representation elsewhere. The extensive personal and legal challenges faced by many of the Society's clients require a significant expenditure of time and resources to provide adequate representation and achieve exceptional outcomes. The Society believes that where a legal remedy exists for a City resident, the individual should not be denied access to that because they cannot afford a competent attorney or any attorney at all. The federal funding in question makes it possible for the Society to have a profound positive impact on these individuals' lives in such situations. Therefore, for the benefit of the residents of this City, we urge the City Council to adopt this resolution.





clarification, and carry out activities in public with more self-assurance. For our English speaking students, public speaking is an opportunity to express themselves and share their opinions in a small classroom setting, which is often not easy to do in a large school.

### The Success

Last year, the program was rated "Excellent" by DYCD. This means it was an "Exemplary; model for other programs." In the Apex program:

- 86% of the students increased their scores by 160 points.
- 100% raise their English or Math grades by at least three points
- 70% of our students enrolled in college compared with 43% of the entire school

Lin G. participated in our program in 2009-2010. He was a recent immigrant from China with limited English language skills. He dreamed of being a police officer but with a limited understanding of American society, he had no idea what steps were needed to become one. Through the Apex program, he improved his English skills through the SAT class and public speaking. He attended the college and career preparation classes and met adults who pointed him in the right direction on how to achieve his goal. He is now studying at CUNY's John Jay College of Criminal Justice.

David P. participated in our program the same year. He grew up in the Chinatown area and started the program with a SAT score of 880 out of 2400. He realized the work he need to do to get into school and took the SAT's several times. He is now a student at the Ivy League school Brown University.

### The Cuts

Apex provided this program for three years and was renewed by DYCD for a fourth this coming school year. Due to the White House's proposed \$350 million in cuts to CSBG programming, this very successful program might be cancelled.

Without this program, the chances of doing well in high school, going to college and finding good careers decrease dramatically.

I understand these are difficult economic times and national deficit is on the minds many Americans, but programs that empower at-risk youth, that enable them to climb the social ladder, acquire productive careers and change their lives for the better is the American dream and must be prioritized. \$350 million in savings is very small compared with the \$920 billion we spend on Health and Human Services or \$620 billion on Defense. When it is time to look for places to cut or savings for our future, we should not look to cut things that help those most in need. This ideal is something I believed President Obama and his administration stood for when I voted him and campaigned door-to-door in Pennsylvania for him last election.

I welcome the opportunity to work with the City Council and advocate to the federal government to restore this essential funding.

Thank you for this permitting me to submit testimony. We look forward to working with the City Council to ensure that we continue to provide our youth a better future.



**New York City Council**  
**Committee on Youth Services and Committee of Community Development**  
**Proposed Res. No. 687-A, calling on the New York City Congressional Delegation and President Barack Obama to prevent cuts to the Community Services Block Grant Program**  
**June 22, 2012**

**Testimony of Michael Lee, Executive Director, Asian Professional Extension, Inc. (soon to be renamed "Apex for Youth")**

My name is Michael Lee and I am Executive Director of Asian Professional Extension, which will soon be renamed to Apex for Youth. I would like to thank Chair Fidler and Chair Vann for holding this public hearing on preventing cuts to the Community Service Block Grant Program.

Apex for Youth is a twenty-year old community-based organization that delivers possibilities to youth from low-income immigrant backgrounds by connecting them with professionals who volunteer as their mentors and teachers. Through one-on-one mentoring, accessible test preparation classes and culturally-sensitive afterschool programs, Apex recruits volunteers who inspire youth to achieve their goals.

Three years ago, Apex was awarded a contract by the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) to provide an after school program to 25-30 high school students a year at Murry Bergrtraum High School for Business Careers. The contract is funded by the Community Service Block Grant Program (CSBG).

**The School**

Murry Bergrtraum is a school located here in lower Manhattan with over 2,400 students. The college enrollment rate from the school is 43%. A New York Post article on March 11, 2012 entitled "Halls of hell at NY's worst high school" wrote about the school and an incident where a student struck a police sergeant in the face during a student disturbance.

**The Students**

The program targets at-risk youth who either are scoring below a 70 in one of their classes or currently classified as an "English-as-a-Second-Language" or ESL student. The average SAT score at Murry Bergrtraum is 1246 out of 2400. The average score for our students last year starting the program was 958.

Last year, one third of the students resided in households where the income is between \$0 – 10,000, and 23 are receiving Medicaid. 3 have no medical insurance. A total of 18 students were recent immigrants from China and 12 students were English native speakers. There were 13 male students and 17 female students.

In a school with 2,400 students, it is almost impossible to receive personalized attention. Combine that with limited English skills, success for these students is difficult.

**The Program**

The program meets three to four times a week for the entire school year and provides SAT test preparation, college and career readiness, public speaking class and a curriculum called "In the Spirit of Jazz," where Jazz is used as a model for an emerging professional culture in which individuals are working in a dynamic work environment where you need improvisation as well as structure to work towards a common goal. The program is culturally and linguistically appropriate for the unique set of students we serve.

The public speaking class in particular helps students gain confidence in their communication abilities. For the ESL students, they learn about body language and looking people in the eye. This bolsters their confidence to participate during the school day in class discussion, ask more questions of their classroom teachers for

**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: Kayza Kleinman

Address: 1934 President St

I represent: Jewish Com. Council of Gr. Ct

Address: 153 300th W 37th St Brooklyn 11224

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. 687A

in favor  in opposition

Date: 6/22/12

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Karen Cacace

Address: The Legal Aid Society

I represent: 199 Water St 3rd Fl.

Address: NY, NY 10038

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 6/22/12

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aaron Halegua / ~~Karen Cacace~~

Address: 199 Water St, 3rd Fl.

I represent: The Legal Aid Society

Address: above

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

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Suzanne Lynn, Deputy Comm

Address: Cindy Colter, Asst. Comm

I represent: DYCD

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Appearance Card

687-A

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 6/22/12

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Michael Lee

Address: 529 Court St. Brooklyn NY 11231

I represent: Asian Professional Extension (APEX)

Address: 80 Marden Lane Suite 1102, NY NY 10058

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Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sandy Myers, Shana Mosher, Kathy Fitzgibbons

Address: 130 E. 59th St.

I represent: Save LSBG NYC

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Igor Kuprshmit

Address: 3054 Brighton 6 Apt 2

I represent: myself

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: IRA STRIZHEVSKI

Address: 3054 Brighton 6 apt 2

I represent: myself

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Larisa Peidi

Address: 2320 King's Hwy # C7

I represent: my self

Address: Brookl. NY. 11229

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: 6/20

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Pavel Vaysberg

Address: 1245 Ave X, Ap. 4-H

I represent: myself

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: 1100P BROZGOL

Address: 11602 W 105TH ST, 11223

I represent: MYSELF

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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