

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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June 27, 2016

Start: 1:15 p.m.

Recess: 3:32 p.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers - City Hall

B E F O R E: CARLOS MENCHACA
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Mathieu Eugene
Daniel Dromm
Peter A. Koo
Rafael L. Espinal, Jr.

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

Eileen Reilly, Vice President
Refugee Services, CAMBA

Lena Alhusseini, Executive Director
Arab-American Family Support Center

Avigail Ziv, Executive Director
New York International Rescue Committee

Phavit Chapati (sp?)
Nepali Refugee

Professor Lenni Benson
New York City Law School
Director, Safe Passage Project

Matthew Kennis, Program Director
Libertas Center for Human Rights
Elmhurst Hospital

Kelly Agnew-Barajas, Director
Refugee Settlement
Catholic Charities

Rebecca Kirschner, Director
Campaigns for HIAS

Georgette Bennett, Founder
Multi-Faith Alliance for Syrian Refugees and
Tanenbaum Center for Religious Understanding

Cynthia Boca (sp?)
Make the Road New York

Miguel Marlow
Faith in New York

Julius Oriano
Progress and Accion

Walter Sinche
International Ecuadorian Alliance

Ybara Hawan (sp?)
Arab-American Association

George Heroshi (sp?) Co-President
New York Japanese-American Citizen's League

Kiva Al Rahawan
Arab-American Association

Melissa Haitian Immigrant
Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees

2 [sound check, pause]

3 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: --the Council's
4 Committee on Immigration. Before going any further,
5 I will--I would also like to introduce other members
6 of the committee and members who are here today in
7 support of the causes we'll be speaking to. On my
8 far left from Queens Council Member Julissa Ferreras-
9 Copeland. From Brooklyn, Council Member Steve Levin.
10 After the devastating decision by the Supreme Court
11 last week to keep the injunction against President
12 Obama's DAPA and expanded DACA programs in place, we
13 must look to other ways to support our immigrant and
14 refugee communities. The City of New York has always
15 welcomed immigrants with open arms. Our commitment
16 to ensure quality and access to quality healthcare
17 programs free public schools, trustworthy legal
18 services, and adult education and also IDNYC. How
19 many of you here today have your IDNYC? Raise your
20 hands? Beautiful. Thank you and for those who have
21 not, I encourage you to continue to do what you need
22 to do to get this ID and my team will help you do
23 that. All of this is regardless of your immigration
24 status here in New York City, and we have set
25 ourselves apart as a national leader. In addition to

2 caring for our local immigrant communities, New York
3 City leads the charge in advocating for federal
4 policies that address the humanitarian needs of those
5 who have been displaced on account of natural
6 disasters, climate change, war. Since the start of
7 the bloody and multi-sited civil war in Syria. More
8 than 4.8 million refugees have fled the country, and
9 are in dire need of resettlement. The United Nations
10 has called upon all of its member states to accept
11 and resettle Syrian refugees, yet, only about 160,000
12 spots have been pledged worldwide. That only meets
13 3.6% of the need for resettlement of Syrian refugees
14 outside the country. The United States has committed
15 to accepting only 10,000 in Fiscal Year 2016. We
16 must--we must--we must do better. Not only has our
17 commitment paled in comparison to other countries,
18 but our ability to keep this commitment has come
19 under question given the low number of refugees that
20 have actually been resettled. In a few months we
21 have left in this fiscal year, the United States must
22 allocated sufficient resources to ensure that we meet
23 our commitment this fiscal year. Further, we ensure
24 that the U.S. increases number of refugees that
25 resettle in 2017 to at least 65,000, and that is our

2 ask today. We will explore how the United States and
3 the city of New York can support Ecuadorian
4 Nationals--and this is the second resolution--who are
5 presenting in the United States when a devastating
6 earthquake of 7.8 magnitude hit Ecuador in April 16,
7 2016. Almost 700 Ecuadorians tragically lost their
8 lives, and thousands more were injured. The damage
9 to buildings, schools, healthcare centers, and other
10 infrastructure is to project to require almost \$3
11 billion to restore. Today, the Committee on
12 Immigration will explore ways in which the city can
13 support our refugees, and those who cannot safely
14 return to their homes on account of all the things
15 we've just talked about. The com--committee will
16 hearing Proposed Resolution 1105-A, which calls upon
17 the United States, the President and the State
18 Department to resettle at least 10,000 this year for
19 that commitment that we've already made and the
20 65,000 that we want in 2017, and that's Reso 1105.
21 The committee's second Resolution is 1103, which
22 calls upon the Secretary of the Department of
23 Homeland Security to designate Ecuador for temporary
24 protected status, and we have already received their
25 request from their country for this TPS status.

2 I would like to thank the Mayor's Office
3 of Immigrant Affairs, and to the community leaders
4 and advocates, the families that have been affected
5 who are here today, and for your testimony. That,
6 which we will hear and that which you will also
7 submit and that--that testimony that's in--within
8 your heart support our communities. I now want to
9 hand it over to Council Member Julissa Ferreras-
10 Copeland and to Council Member Steve Levin for their
11 opening remarks.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER FERRERAS-COPELAND: Thank
13 you, Chair Menchaca. Thank you for your leadership
14 for holding this hearing, and coming to the defense
15 of immigrants at such an important time in the United
16 States. Thank you as well to the crew's legal
17 services Make the Road, Faith in New York, the New
18 York Immigration Coalition and others who have come
19 to City Hall today to share their stories. I look
20 forward to hearing--and hearing your testimony--
21 testimony be codified into the record, and that is
22 what's so important about this hearing today.
23 Resolution 1103 of 2016 asks the Department of
24 Homeland Security to do for Ecuador what they have
25 already done for so many who have faced immeasurable

2 life-changing devastation in their homelands due to
3 natural disasters. Ecuador is no different. In
4 fact, Ecuadorians in New York have contributed so
5 much culturally, economically and as civic leaders
6 that there should be no question about whether or not
7 the country should lead--should lend Ecuador and
8 Ecuadorians support. With this resolution I urge the
9 Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security to
10 designate Ecuador for temporary protective status to
11 allow Ecuadorians to stay here away from the
12 tremendous hardship, and enable them to support their
13 hometowns. Thank you again to Speaker Melissa Mark-
14 Viverito for her strong support, and to my colleagues
15 who saw the urgent need to support this community,
16 Carlos Menchaca, Daniel Dromm, Rafael Espinal,
17 Mathieu Eugene, Peter Koo and Anthony Reynoso, all of
18 our Council colleagues. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Good morning,
21 everybody. I'm Council Member Stephen Levin, and I
22 want to thank all of you for being here today as we
23 discuss the critical topic of how we as a city might
24 better support displaced communities. I want to
25 begin by thanking Chair Carlos Menchaca for joining

2 me in co-sponsoring Resolution 1105, which calls on
3 the federal government to fulfill and expand upon its
4 commitment to resettle Syrian refugees in the United
5 States, and I want to thank Chair Menchaca for
6 brining the matter before this committee today. I
7 also want to thank my colleague Julissa Ferreras-
8 Copeland for her important work to highlight the
9 needs of displaced Ecuadorians through Resolution
10 1103, which I also fully support and endorse. I am
11 grateful for this occasion to work with both of you
12 to call upon our federal leaders to protect
13 vulnerable populations in our global community.
14 Finally, I want to share my sincere appreciation for
15 all of the resettlement agencies, advocates and
16 individuals in this room who work tirelessly to
17 provide support and release to refugees, asylum
18 seekers and immigrants in New York City and around
19 the world. I look forward to hearing from you all
20 today about the challenges faced by new arrivals to
21 our city and opportunities to better support the
22 resettlement and ability to thrive. The Syrian
23 refugee crisis has been called the most complex
24 humanitarian disaster of our time, an ongoing five-
25 year civil war in Syria has taken an estimated

2 250,000 lives and has drive more than 11 million
3 people, six out of ten Syrians to flee their home.

4 Just to put that in context, after World War II there
5 were estimated between 11 million and 20 million
6 displaced people from Europe. So let's--let's think
7 about that for a moment, and think about the
8 worldwide response that we as a--as a human race had
9 to that crisis, and how we can fulfill our role in
10 our generation in our time to meet that need.

11 Documented human rights violations are widespread and
12 basic necessities like food, water and medical care
13 are sparse. The conflict has caused the in-country
14 displacement of almost seven million Syrians, and has
15 forced an additional five million to leave their
16 homeland becoming refugees. The number of refugees
17 has exponentially increased as the conflict has
18 worsened, and is only expected to grow. There are
19 more than 21.3 million refugees worldwide, and under
20 the United Nations Mandate, Syrians comprise the
21 world's largest refugee population. I would add that
22 more than half of Syrian refugees are children under
23 the age of 18. Many are separated from their parents
24 and have been out of school for months if not years.
25 It is clear to me that it is our moral imperative as

2 a country to do everything we can to resettle and
3 support this particularly vulnerable population,
4 which is why Resolution 1105 calls on the President
5 of the United States and the State Department to
6 uphold its promise to resettle at least 10,000 Syrian
7 refugees in the United States by the end of September
8 2016, and to increase that number to 65,000 by the
9 end of fiscal of fiscal year 2017. This September in
10 New York City the United Nations will host a high
11 level meeting of international leaders regarding
12 refugees and migrants. It is particularly important
13 that in advance of this meeting the United States
14 fulfill and expand its commitment to refugees and
15 immigrants in a spirit of compassion and generosity.
16 There has been a worldwide rise in nationalism that
17 we must stand up against for the international bonds
18 of brotherhood and common humanity. We must stand up
19 and say no to xenophobia to prejudice, to racism to
20 anti-immigrant sentiment and anti-Muslim sentiment.
21 If we remain silent, we will be complicit and we
22 cannot let that happen. Diversity strengthens our
23 country, and enables all of us to flourish, and I
24 want to thank my Legislative Director Julie Bero, my
25 former Chief of Staff Rami Metal, Speaker Mark-

2 Viverito and her entire staff and again Chair Carlos
3 Menchaca for bringing this matter to this committee
4 today. Thank you very much.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, Council
6 Member Steve Levin, and I also want to make sure that
7 we welcome from Queens Council Member Peter Koo.
8 Now, what I want to do now is ask if there's a
9 representative from the Mayor's Office of Immigrant
10 Affairs here. Okay. Oh, will you be testifying
11 today? Okay, great. So, we are going to go to our
12 first panel, and the panel that I'll be reading out,
13 if you can join us over here at the--at the desk to
14 my right. Phavit Chapati (sp?); Avigail Ziv with the
15 International Rescue committee; Lena Alhusseini
16 Arab-American Family; Eileen Riley, CAMBA, and as you
17 get settled one of the things that's important here
18 is not only are we asking our federal government on
19 both of these resolutions to do better, we want to do
20 better here ourselves as well. And so, we're asking
21 organizations to tell us a little bit about how it
22 actually happens. We want to remove the mystery
23 about how we support our refugees, and we want
24 everyone at home in New York that's listening to
25 understand exactly how that happens. Where are the

2 issues? What can we do here internally to make
3 changes so that we can bring more refugees, that we
4 can support more of our Ecuadorian--Ecuadorian and
5 other displaced people here in our city, and these
6 are the advocates that are on the ground doing that
7 work. I can't wait to hear from--from you, and we
8 can--and we can start here from our left. Please
9 introduce yourself and begin. [pause]

10 EILEEN REILLY: Mr. Chairman, Council
11 Members Levin and Menchaca, members of the committee
12 and my fellow New Yorkers. My name is Eileen Reilly,
13 and my people were refugees, too. I'm the Vice
14 President at CAMBA with oversight of our refugee
15 services. CAMBA is one of New York City's largest
16 and most trusted community-based organizations and is
17 unique among peer organizations in scale, quality and
18 responsiveness. Found in 1977 as the Merchant's
19 Block Association, the agency has grown in direct
20 response to the needs of the communities we serve.
21 Today, CAMBA provides services 45,000 individuals and
22 families annually throughout the five boroughs with
23 an integrated set of six program areas: Economic
24 Development, Education and Youth Development, Family
25 Support, Health, Housing and Legal Services. Through

2 our comprehensive continuum of care, CAMBA provides
3 services, which connect people with opportunities to
4 enhance their quality of life. What many people
5 don't realize is that CAMBA began with the mission to
6 provide economic development and services to refugees
7 in Central Brooklyn in the late 1970s. Since 1994,
8 we have been an affiliate of the United States
9 Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, USCRI. As a
10 USCRI affiliate, we have settled over 10,000 refugees
11 from 52 countries in the last 22 years. We have a
12 strong track record as a refugee resettlement agency.
13 Each year, 90% of newly arriving refugees in asylees
14 that we serve are placed in jobs and achieve economic
15 self-sufficiency within three months of their arrival
16 in the United States. More broadly speaking, refugee
17 resettlement in New York has been an overwhelming
18 success by any measure, whether we look at job
19 placements, college attendance, business starts or
20 homeownership. The five refugee resettlement
21 agencies in the city have helped new arrivals to
22 become independent and contributing members of their
23 communities. Today, I would like to talk to you
24 about Resolution No. 1105-A, which calls upon the
25 President and the State Department to resettle at

2 least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the United States of
3 America by end of Fiscal Year 2016 and to increase
4 that number to 65,000 by the end of Year 2017.

5 Recent changes in the refugee resettlement process
6 have brought the inflow of new refugees arriving in
7 the United States to a near standstill. This has
8 happened while the Syrian Civil War now in its sixth
9 year has caused almost five million Syrians to flee
10 their homeland as refugees. This number is only
11 expected to grow as the conflict grinds on. Make no
12 mistake about it, Syrian refugees are the victims,
13 not the perpetrators of terrorism. They do not pose
14 a meaningly risk--a meaningful risk to our national
15 security. Moreover, refugees are vetted more
16 intensively than any other category of traveler, and
17 this vetting takes place while they are still
18 overseas. Those seeking resettlement are screened by
19 national and international intelligence agencies
20 multiple times. They're fingerprints and other
21 biometric data are checked against terrorists and
22 criminal databases, and they are interviewed several
23 times over the course of a vetting process. It takes
24 at least 18 to 24 months and often longer. A blank
25 ban on Syrian refugees only feeds the narrative of

2 ISIS that there is a war between Islam and the West,
3 and that Muslims are not welcome in the United States
4 or Europe. In fact, the United States has been built
5 on successful immigration since its inception. While
6 we must remain diligent to keep our nation safe from
7 terrorists, foreign or domestic, we must also remain
8 true to our values as a pluralist nation that
9 welcomes vulnerable populations fleeing conflict and
10 seeking peace. Our goal as a country should remain
11 combating religious, ethnic and gender based
12 persecution and, furthermore, we should remember that
13 resettlement initiatives help to advance United
14 States national security interests by supporting the
15 stability of our allies and partners who are
16 themselves struggling to host these large numbers of
17 refugees. Since the start of the city--Syrian Civil
18 War in 2011, the United States has admitted only
19 about 4,100 Syrian refugees. This is a grossly
20 inadequate response to this humanitarian crisis.
21 CAMBA therefore joins in the City Council's call for
22 the President and the Department of State to resettle
23 at least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the United States
24 by then end of Fiscal 2016, and to increase that
25 number to 65,000 by end of Fiscal Year 2017. Thank

2 you for allowing us to testify. I hope that this
3 information we have provided about the needs of the
4 refugee community is helpful to your deliberations.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much.

6 LENA ALHUSSEINI: [off mic] Okay, Chair
7 Menchaca--Can you hear me? [on mic] Okay, is that
8 working now? Okay. Council Member Menchaca, Council
9 Member Levin, Council Member Ferreras thank you for
10 your leadership. This is a very important topic to
11 us. My name Lena Alhusseini, and I am the Executive
12 Director of the Arab-American Family Support Center.
13 Established in 1994, AFSC is the oldest and largest
14 Arabic speaking social service agency in New York
15 City. We are a trauma informed, culturally competent
16 settlement house. We provide cultural and
17 linguistic--culturally and linguistically competent
18 services to Arab, Middle Eastern, Muslim and South
19 Asian immigrant communities. This year we have
20 received countless questions regarding the influx of
21 Syrian refugees seeking services from our
22 organization, and I cannot begin to tell you how
23 disappointed it makes me to report that--I need my
24 glasses. Sorry. [laughs]--that this influx is non-
25 existent. Since 2011, only a 140 Syrian refugees

2 have been admitted to the entire State of New York.

3 The United--United States has only admitted 9% of the
4 suggested 26,000 referrals made by UNHRD. This is
5 truly disgraceful, and obviously quite disappointing.

6 The United States is a nation built upon the bravery
7 and drive of refugees and immigrants, and the noble
8 willingness of those who welcome and take them in.

9 Indeed New York is at the center of these values. It
10 is in our harbor no more than three miles from where
11 we stand where the following words were etched:

12 *Give me your tired, your poor, your*
13 *huddled masses yearning to breathe free. Send these*
14 *the homeless, the tempest tossed to me.*

15 Embracing our role as the nation's
16 melting pot, is what cultivates the New York we're so
17 proud of. Accepting Syrian refugees to our five
18 boroughs would have one major consequence, and that
19 is ultimately a more diverse creative, healthy, and
20 vibrant city. There are hard-working educated people
21 who understandably believe the world has given up on
22 them. Indeed, just last week we celebrated the
23 opening of an exhibit in the Film City Art (sic),
24 which is roughly in present day Tribeca. That
25 community gave us Kahill Gibran, Ahmad Dhani and many

2 other Arab-Americans that have contributed to New
3 York and our nation. By the way, including Steve
4 Jobs [laughs] whose father was a Syrian refugee. So
5 all your Apple stuff. An inte--an integral first
6 step for the government of New York City would be to
7 commit to cultural and linguistic sensitivity,
8 ensuring that all New Yorkers are able to access the
9 same resources and information. We need much more
10 funding on that literacy. The New York City
11 Commission on Human Rights is moving in the right
12 direction with its language access policy, and
13 implementation plan, and I hope to see it fully
14 implemented throughout New York City's agencies.
15 Another essential development is to increase funding
16 for community-based organizations and settlement
17 houses that directly serve communities in need. We
18 see these orgs fill in where our government cannot.
19 Initiatives such as the Non-Profit Stabilization
20 [bell] Fund are incredibly important as they help
21 bolster our organizational infrastructure and,
22 therefore, ensure that we are able to provide more
23 support to our clients, and continue building the
24 programs that so many rely on. As a city, we must
25 push ourselves to a role with an eye towards

2 compassion and justice. We must take our own steps
3 for our fellow New Yorkers, and we must stand by
4 Resolution 1105 to--2016 to significantly increase
5 the number of Syrian refugees admitted to our nation.
6 The only fear we should allow ourselves to be
7 compelled by at this moment of our nation's history
8 is the fear that we forget our moral duty to fellow
9 human beings. Thank you.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much.

11 LENA ALHUSSEINI: Thank you.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Ms. Avigail Ziv,
13 please.

14 ABIGAIL ZIV: Good afternoon. My name is
15 Avigail Ziv. I'm the Executive Director for the
16 International Rescue Committee in New York. I would
17 like to thank Committee Chair Menchaca and Council
18 Members Levin and Ferreras-Copeland, and other
19 committee members here today for giving us the
20 opportunity to speak about this very important issue.
21 The IRC is unique in that it is a global organization
22 that responds to the world's worst humanitarian
23 crisis and that work in 40 countries around the world
24 while also working in 29 U.S. cities to oversee
25 refugee resettlement and provide services to asylees

2 and other immigrants. The IRC New York is the oldest
3 in IRC's network and has been resettling refugees
4 here for over 80 years. We are currently
5 experiencing a refugee crisis worldwide. Sixty-five
6 million or every one in 113 people are displaced.
7 There have never been more refugees, 20 million last
8 year alone. Mark--March marked the fifth anniversary
9 of the Syrian conflict, a conflict that has driven
10 half of the country's population from its homes.
11 Almost five million Syrian refugees have fled their
12 country losing everything their have--they have. In
13 the face of other diplomatic failure to broker a
14 solution and end the violence, innocent families
15 continue to flee to escape the indiscriminate impacts
16 of a brutal conflict as well as targeted violence.
17 Syria constitutes the single most urgent humanitarian
18 situation of our time. Yet, around the world so many
19 other conflicts continue to produce human suffering
20 as well. As you know, and we have heard before,
21 refugees are the most thoroughly vetted group of
22 people amongst all immigrants and non-immigrants who
23 come to this country. The Refugee Resettlement
24 Program is the most difficult way for people to enter
25 the U.S. Refugees do not self-select to be

2 resettled. They are identified by the U.N. Refugee
3 Agency on the basis of specific needs and
4 vulnerabilities. They are meticulously screened
5 before coming and being referred to one of a dozen
6 countries. Maintaining the integrity of the U.S.
7 Refugee Program is of paramount importance, and the
8 IRC supports efforts by the U.S. Government to ensure
9 the program's integrity is preserved and constantly
10 improved. Our response to the pro--proliferation of
11 the global humanitarian crisis matters for tens of
12 thousands of refugees whose lives we save each year,
13 and every year by welcoming them with welcome arms
14 into our communities like New York City. The IRC New
15 York will continue to work with these individuals and
16 families, and we believe that the New York City
17 Council can continue to play a pivotal role and
18 support that they have been with this population, and
19 for the resettlement agencies meeting the needs and
20 community-based organizations of the Syrians and
21 other refugees often with limited funding.

22 We have been disappointed to see some
23 voices in the country call for an end to refugee
24 resettlement perpetuate--perpetrating false
25 information about who refugees are and the process

2 they undergo to get here. Such calls as well as the
3 recent Supreme Court ruling on the President's
4 Immigration Actions are not aligned with our
5 country's foundational identify and values of being a
6 nation of welcome and a beacon of freedom for the
7 persecuted. We are, therefore, particularly grateful
8 [bell] for the show of solidarity from the New York
9 City Council, and we thank you for the opportunity to
10 give testimony today.

11 PHAVIT CHAPATI: Good afternoon,
12 everyone. My name Phavit Chapati (sp?) and my family
13 is with me, and I was born and raised in a refugee
14 camp in Nepal. At the age of 15, my family and I got
15 resettled in New York City by the International
16 Rescue Committee. About 80,000 of these refugees
17 have been settled in the United States, and we are
18 trying to help to establish ourselves in this new
19 community. No longer safe to live in our home
20 country, my parents came to the United States seeking
21 a better life for themselves and the--and for me.
22 Coming to the United States and making a home in New
23 York City for me and my family has provided the most
24 incredible opportunities, but it has not been without
25 its challenges. This city can be vast with

2 possibilities and choices, but at the same time it
3 can be very incredibly overwhelming. At the same
4 time, my family and I have been lucky be invest by an
5 incredible community that has shown great respect and
6 welcoming. This generosity and spirit has been
7 essential in helping us to transition our lives in
8 here. It has been eight years since my family and I
9 got resettled in New York. Since then I have
10 graduated from high school as a valedictorian,
11 received a grant (sic) and a scholarship, and now I
12 am a senior at New York University majoring in film
13 and television and minor in global education. During
14 these past years, I also thought a lot about the
15 refugee experience, our identity, integrational
16 challenges, and what it takes to unleash the
17 potential of young people like myself. What support
18 do they need to succeed in school, and reach their
19 successful academic and professional careers. I am
20 still trying to answer these questions, but I have
21 seen the value of structured programs that can help
22 to build communities. The ISU offered this to me and
23 my peers and including the Refugee Youth Summer
24 Academy and Leaders in Training program. With both of
25 these programs I have experienced reciprocation of

2 ideas and support. It was an even take experience
3 for both me and the other refugee peers from all over
4 the world. I hope the City Council continues to
5 invest in refugees and other immigrants in making
6 their home here, and provide support for programs and
7 organizations that can help pave the way for these
8 new arrivals to New York City to be successful. I
9 hope and I believe that the more we can do to support
10 and understand the lives of refugees and asylum
11 seekers the more we can answer that families like
12 mine can successfully start their new lives. At the
13 end, I would like to say a line from a film that I
14 recently wrote. It says, *"When angry men fall into a
15 dense forest--when angry men fall into a dense forest
16 nothing happens to the forest. Nothing happens to
17 the rain, but the innocent birds that were living in
18 the forest have to flee away. They are the victims."*
19 And as a refugee who lived in a refugee camp for 15
20 years, I can relate to those innocent birds, and as--
21 as human beings it is our humanity to welcome them
22 [bell], and not question them or not mistreat them.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, Mr.
24 Chapati for telling us your story, for being a young
25 person with so much hope and--and commitment to not

2 only yourself and your family and your community, but
3 to the larger question that we're talking about
4 today. And I know you represent so many of the other
5 young people who are experiencing what you've
6 experienced as well, and so thank you being here and
7 being their voices for us today.

8 PHAVIT CHAPATI: Thank you for inviting.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: I want to start
10 Q&A and really with the--specifically IRC and Ms.
11 Ziv, if you can talk to us a little bit about the--
12 the services and costs that are related to our
13 question here on refugee support and the federal
14 government specifically. What is covered at the
15 federal government--at the federal level, and then if
16 you can start painting the picture because we want to
17 start bringing it back to city, and thinking about
18 where we plug in at the end of the day. Can you--can
19 you share us--share with us that--that work?

20 AVIGAIL ZIV: Sure. I'm happy to. The
21 federal government provides us with support--

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [interposing] Can
23 you pull the mic closer to you?

24 AVIGAIL ZIV: Sure.

25 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

2 AVIGAIL ZIV: Is this better? The
3 federal government provides us the support for about
4 the first three months of a refugee's arrival, but it
5 is minimal amounts of money per client. So it's
6 \$1,125 per person when they arrive. So if you think
7 of, you know, a family of three let's say that's a
8 little over \$3,000 and that's mean to really help
9 them to find a home, if they don't have a friend or a
10 family to live with. That's to help them with pocket
11 cash, with getting all of the supplied that they
12 might need if they need furniture. Really to set up
13 their lives here. So, as you can imagine, New York
14 City being as it is, that doesn't go a very long way.
15 We are lucky enough to have individuals and other
16 supports who provide us with funding that can augment
17 that, but we are always looking for additional
18 support to make sure that people can meet their basic
19 needs.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Can I--can I pause
21 you there?

22 AVIGAIL ZIV: Sure.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Can you tell us a
24 little bit about where that support is coming from?

25 AVIGAIL ZIV: Uh-huh. Sure.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And what that gap
3 is. Tell--help us understand what that full gap is.

4 AVIGAIL ZIV: Sure. It--it depends also
5 on timing I should say. Some people, you know, they--
6 --they can continue on for awhile with the immediate
7 support that they're given while others, you know,
8 need additional support earlier on. The--the
9 additional funding we get comes from foundations. It
10 comes from individuals. It's--it's really a mix at
11 least for our organization, and I would imagine that
12 the other resettlement agencies might have a similar
13 type of mix. We also get some funding from the
14 State, and some funding from the city for some other
15 complementary programs. But often we have what we
16 call an emergency fund. It's really to meet
17 sometimes the basic needs of our--our--our clients
18 when they're looking for their first job, and maybe
19 they're getting a job, but it's really just paying
20 them minimum wage, and it's just a starter to
21 something bigger and further them to build their
22 career and their professional development. And we
23 want to be able to help them cover their rent, cover
24 any sort of additional needs that they might have for
25 their kids or for their elderly parents that might be

2 here with us. It really varies in terms of the
3 amount between people. Does that help to answer your
4 question?

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: That's--that's
6 helpful. What I think is important here is that
7 we're--we're kind of revealing a--a kind initiation
8 by the federal government--

9 AVIGAIL ZIV: [interposing] Uh-huh.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: --and then--and
11 then essentially the--the kind of integration into
12 city services.

13 AVIGAIL ZIV: Uh-huh.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And so what we
15 want to know is essentially what--what might be
16 different for a refugee process at the city level,
17 and--and so any--any--anything that can--that can
18 kind of be--

19 AVIGAIL ZIV: [interposing] Uh-huh.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: --spoken to on the
21 other organizations would be--would be helpful, and
22 what we also want to make sure is elevate--because
23 we're--we're in a need right now to really understand
24 exactly what we're talking about. We--we're all in
25 tune with the compassion that we want to give that

2 translates into something, and we need to be able to
3 articulate those needs to the administration and the
4 city level and the state as well. Mental health
5 services become another piece that we've got to talk
6 about as we think about that trans--transition. Is
7 there anybody else that can talk to the mental health
8 resources specifically, and then the linguists--the--
9 the language access issue and the culturally
10 competent issue as well.

11 EILEEN REILLY: Councilman, yeah, I'd be
12 happy to give that a shot, and I wanted to follow up
13 to follow up to Avigail's and to--something that you--
14 -that you asked about the funding the gaps. So the
15 amount of money that the federal government provides
16 to refugee resettlement agencies is the same across
17 the country whether you're being settled in Idaho or,
18 you know, Cheboygan or, you know, or New York City,
19 and these are places that we know have vastly
20 different costs of living. Each resettlement agency
21 operates differently depending on what its business
22 model is. What I mean by that is the IRC as an
23 international agency involved in refugee relief and
24 resettlement is fundraising for those purposes and
25 the New York Office, you know, fundraise privately.

2 CAMBA is really not in a position to do that. We
3 rely exclusively on the public funding, and we really
4 and I--speaking for all the resettlement agencies, we
5 really do an amazing job with--with very little
6 resources. So once that \$3,000 is gone, and--and I
7 have to, you know, make it clear that, you know, what
8 happens is we--we pretty at CAMBA we split with the
9 refugees. So we're using half of it to provide the
10 services, and half it we're giving to people in cash
11 to make their own decisions with about how they need--
12 -want to use this to support families. The main
13 challenge refugees have in New York City is the main
14 challenge that all New Yorkers face economically, and
15 that is housing. And in terms of the follow along
16 funding streams, for many years the State of New York
17 provided funding called New York State Refugee
18 Resettlement Assistance Funding. And unfortunately at
19 the start of the Cuomo Administration that money was
20 repurposed to fund ONA, the Office of New Americans,
21 and each refugee resettlement agency received that
22 funding in proportion to the number of refugees that
23 were resettled. And what it allowed us to do is it
24 allowed us to actually fill the gaps. So now what
25 we're trying to do is to piecemeal together

2 mainstream funding for things like language access,
3 and mental health services. In the area of language
4 access, you know, at CAMBA there's a waiting list, a
5 minimum eight months long for certain classes, and
6 then there's over a year long for more advanced
7 classes. And there's really no public funding, and
8 when I say public funding I'm--I'm being very broad,
9 but most English as a second language funding passes
10 through DYCD. And those programs are extremely
11 structured, prescribed. There's a beginning.
12 There's a middle. There's end. It's not open entry
13 and--and exit. When you're assembly refugees you
14 need to be able to get that person, you know, they--
15 they--we see them within days of their arrival, and
16 we need to get that person into class immediately
17 because our goal is to get them working. Our goal is
18 to engage them, and have them become New Yorkers as
19 soon as possible. With the DYCD model it simply
20 doesn't work. Secondly, many of our--this is not
21 true of Syrian refugees, and Syrians are among the
22 most educated and literate, and highly professional
23 credentialed degreed group of refugees that one could
24 possibly imagine. And so we're hemorrhaging an
25 opportunity to have these folks help us fill the gaps

2 in our labor market, and STEM professions, et cetera.
3 But let me not get started on that. But we--we
4 always settle many refugees who are illiterate in
5 their native language so they cannot be put into a
6 mainstream ESL class. So we need funding that's
7 focused on native language literacy. Of course, it
8 doesn't stop them from speaking English and, you
9 know, going to work and learning English is--is--is
10 the best way forward, and now I'm going to defer to
11 Leanne who can talk about mental health services.

12 LENA ALHUSSEINI: Thank you, Eileen. You
13 covered a lot. I mean definitely at that agency
14 there's a problem with that. I am an with a
15 government agency. I'm a settlement house. So
16 basically we do the same thing. We piecemeal all
17 these different funds from foundations, from city,
18 state, federal agencies to provide a tailored service
19 for the communities that we serve. Often times lots
20 of funds that are available are, you know, you have
21 to do this way, this way and these are our
22 expectations, and we have our own model. We want to
23 tailor our programs to fit the communities that we're
24 serving for them to integrate well. A lot of our
25 community--a lot of the people that we work with I

2 don't have them for three months or eleven months. I
3 get them after the three months and eleven months,
4 and I stay with them as long as they're--they want to
5 stay with me. Some of our clients have been with us
6 since 1994. The moms keep coming because it's a sort
7 of place. But what we do we help them integrate, and
8 we provide services to them that--that engage them
9 with others. We don't find the isolation that other
10 refugees in other countries and New York because our
11 community engages with other settlement houses. They
12 work together, you know, our kids were out there, you
13 know, wanting the summer camp funding. So they feel
14 a part of New York, and that's I think an opportunity
15 for New Yorkers. We do resettlement or integration I
16 believe best, and we've done twice. I know you only
17 have to look through your NH members and see how well
18 that's been done. In terms of mental health services
19 there very little mental health services. We are a
20 trauma-informed agency. We work also through a
21 culture--culture humility model, which is let's say I
22 come from--I'm--I come from the France system and I'm
23 working with somebody from Yemen. I don't presume I
24 know their culture just because I speak their
25 language. I let them lead me, and that's a--that has

2 completely transformed our practice because we have
3 to under--we have to ask people to lead us in what's
4 best for them, not to presume our way is the best
5 way, right? In terms of mental health, there are no
6 resources. So much so, I actually just enrolled in a
7 PhD program for--for it --[laughs]--to become a
8 clinical psychologist because there's very few
9 resources that understand the culture, that
10 understand the practice of working with the culture.
11 We work with--with, you know, the Institute of
12 Psychotherapy with Columbia University, but very
13 places offer that competent sort of model that works
14 with people who have suffered as much as many of the
15 refugees have suffered. And you have to work with
16 the whole family, and you have to work along with
17 them. There is no funding for us. We've been
18 looking for funding. We've--we've applied for
19 federal but there isn't a funding that--that is
20 practical for us. So anything. There isn't much
21 there to be honest.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Well, and--and
23 thank you again for--for kind of giving us that--that
24 both the--the--the assurance of the remodeling how
25 we're doing it here in New York City. What I--what I

2 also want to make sure is that we also speak to the
3 Anti-Muslim sentiment that we're--we're seeing, too,
4 in the rhetoric and how--how specifically Arab-
5 American Support Center how are you doing--what are
6 you doing, and how do you need support to continue to
7 mitigate that as you integrate families? And then
8 I'm going to hand it over to Council Member Steve
9 Levin for his questions as well, but I think that
10 kind of rounds out how we think about both
11 integration for particular communities, but also
12 making sure that when we think about the full
13 perspective, we think--we're talking about adult
14 education classes. We're talking about health--
15 healthcare, access to healthcare and mental care
16 issues, housing issues. There are things that New
17 Yorkers are experiencing already, but we're doing it
18 together now as a community, and making sure that
19 every--nobody is left behind in this. So talk just a
20 little bit about the anti-Muslim sentiment and what--
21 what we're doing here in New York.

22 LENA ALHUSSEINI: I mean I don't have to
23 tell you and I'm sure everybody agrees with me here.
24 I mean this whole--the policy and methods of dividing
25 people, it's--it's horrible and it has grave

2 consequences. Our youth their biggest fear is all
3 this Islamophobia, and the bullying and schools by
4 not just the--the students, also by teachers who are
5 watching this media that feed into all those lies.
6 You know, women who are working two jobs, are--are--
7 it's dangerous for them out. We've had a few cases
8 with our clients and our students being attacked on
9 the street, being kicked off buses because they're
10 speaking Arabic. So it's very real danger and hate
11 crimes are document and are increasing because of all
12 the stress over here of hate. I mean today I was
13 telling somebody--I mean the world diabolical. They
14 have the means to separate, right. That means to--to
15 create the vision, and what's the opposite for
16 CMI.(sic) So for us what we've been doing has been
17 we've been working with many different community
18 groups primarily for entrance with the United
19 Neighborhood Houses. So they have already written
20 two letters to--to--against Islamophobia, and most of
21 our settlement house even including CAMBA have signed
22 on, but they continue to reject Islamophobia and we
23 stand together united. That makes a huge difference
24 to the community. When you're all working together,
25 you feel this person is my neighbor and cares for me.

2 This--this--this is way to stop Islamophobia is
3 really to create a community that stops Islamophobia.
4 I can't--as Arab--as an Arab and as a Muslim, I can
5 scream all I want to stop the faces against, but when
6 everybody says the same thing, that's when change
7 occurs, right? So, I hope I answered your question.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: No, think you.
9 Thank you, no, you're--you're--you're speaking to
10 what the work is--

11 LENA ALHUSSEINI: [interposing] Right.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: --and what we need
13 to do to support that work as collective in
14 solidarity.

15 LENA ALHUSSEINI: Right.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Council Member
17 Steve Levin.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you very
19 much Chair Menchaca. So I'll just add to that, and
20 this is coming from me, and I don't mean to be at all
21 political, but there is a presumptive nominee of a
22 major political party in the Untied States that is
23 spreading anti-Islamic rhetoric, and propaganda, and
24 it needs to be stood up against, and it needs to be
25 unequivocally condemned. That's from me.

2 LENA ALHUSSEINI: Thank you. Thank you.
3 I agree wholeheartedly. [laughs]

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I wanted to ask
5 about how the United States compared to other--to--to
6 European nations, right now and how in terms of--of
7 response and in terms of the numbers that other
8 European nations are--are taking in terms of refugees
9 from the Syrian crisis. Does anybody have that kind
10 of information off hand?

11 LENA ALHUSSEINI: I mean off hand,
12 Germany over a million. [laughs] I think that gives
13 you an idea, and--and--and do you want to--I'm sorry.
14 Definitely there are the Scandinavian countries,
15 Germany. Austria has taken much more than they
16 United States although they are smaller. But there's
17 something we forget. We--we are a melting pot. We
18 have the strength. The Europeans have done
19 integration as well as we have. All you have to do
20 is look at our history. So really we should use that
21 as a model for others. I think we have an
22 opportunity to meet in--in bringing in more refugees,
23 and I think it's shameful the number that our
24 Congress has voted to exile.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you.

2 EILEEN REILLY: This is really a very
3 complex question and what I'm going to say is a
4 little reductive, but I'm trying to cover a lot of
5 ground in a short amount of time.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: That's okay.
7 Thank you.

8 EILEEN REILLY: The difference--the
9 primary difference between American refugee policy--
10 that is once the refugee arrives, right. and European
11 policy in this regard in the--in the situation with
12 Syrians is that European policy is reactive, right.
13 They are reacting a specific crisis and that was the
14 same during the War in Bosnia. The same during the
15 Kosovo Crisis. What was different was you didn't
16 have large numbers of refugees who were in geographic
17 proximity to Europe who could there. If this were
18 happening the Dominican Republic let's say right now,
19 we would be facing what Europe is facing. We would
20 be having to come up with some policy that wouldn't--
21 that probably would look very--would--probably would
22 be an awful policy [laughs] you know, from--from afar
23 right. So the thing is that in Europe generally
24 speaking there is still birthright citizen, right.
25 You can--you will never be German. Germany will give

2 you some monetary aid. They may provide you with
3 some temporary housing, but you will never be German,
4 and then when the crisis is deemed to be over in some
5 subjective, you know, sense, you will be expected to
6 be sent home. The United States Immigration Policy
7 is unique in that we accept anyone to flee
8 persecution--to be the victim of persecution, you
9 know, either a well-founded fear or credible fear is
10 the standard. You don't have to have a college
11 degree, or a university degree, which, you know,
12 Australia and Canada have policies that are based on
13 skill. So, the thing about American policy is that
14 when you win that Lotto, right, because there's not
15 enough numbers. We need to be accepting more. We
16 need to grow this program. That's the real problem
17 is the number--the--the numbers of people who are
18 getting in, and that the pipeline is ossified in this
19 way that everyone has described. It's all very well
20 for the--the President and the Senate to say that
21 70,000 refugees will enter in 2016, but we all know
22 that that number will never be met. The number has
23 not been met in the last ten years, right? Right, it
24 has never been met. The--the slots are set aside,
25 and there's funding appropriated. Once we agree on

2 the number of slots, the money flows. There's--
3 there's--there's an amount of funding that's attached
4 to that--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Uh-huh.

6 EILEEN REILLY: --but that number has not
7 been filled--that number has not been filled since
8 2001--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: [interposing] Let
10 me--

11 EILEEN REILLY: --because of the reasons
12 we've described.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Then going back to
14 Post-World War II.

15 EILEEN REILLY: Okay.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I mean just as--
17 as--as what has changed--

18 EILEEN REILLY: [interposing] Let me--

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: --with our policy--
20 -

21 EILEEN REILLY: [interposing] All right,
22 I'll--I'll, you know--

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: --where--where it
24 worked in Post World War II and it's not working now?

2 EILEEN REILLY: --my grandmother Sue
3 Lyons Ferrell sponsored 26 people to become
4 Americans.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: [interposing] Say
6 that once more, please.

7 EILEEN REILLY: And in those days what
8 you had to do is you had to write a letter and say,
9 you know, Joe is not going to wind up on the dole.
10 You know, Joe is not going to wind up on welfare.
11 He's not going to wind up in the poor house. He's
12 can stay with me in my Fort Greene, you know,
13 tenement until he gets his feet on the ground. That
14 was immigration policy, right, and so--and then in
15 World War II and, you know, Avigail can speak to this
16 specifically with the IRC we had an open door. There
17 was no American refugee program per se that was
18 limiting this and--and it certainly--and we have to
19 remember that the Department of the Population
20 Migration and Immigrants, which is the--the part of
21 the State Department that oversees refugee policy,
22 this sits on the National Security Council. You
23 know, you can remember that American refugee policy
24 is arm--is an arm of its foreign policy. It's not a
25 humanitarian program. It furthers foreign policy

2 goals. To the degree that--that the humanitarian
3 goals are also met that's wonderful, but it's primary
4 purpose is to solve foreign policy problems.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Okay.

6 AVIGAIL ZIV: If I can just really
7 quickly add to your question, the U.S. has always
8 been a leader in refugee resettlement historically.
9 We have always resettled more than any in Europe, our
10 neighbors to the north. But I think what you're
11 seeing now is that when we look at Syrians in
12 particular countries in Europe, Canada and others
13 have really been opening their arms and resettling
14 more in those countries than the U.S. is doing. And
15 I think this goes to the presidential commitment to
16 say we really need to increase those numbers, and
17 historically we have been a leader, and we need to
18 continue to be a leader in the numbers of refugees
19 that we let into this country.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: How come we are
21 so--so below our target? What--what is happening
22 that is--is it--is it a question of bureaucracy? A
23 question of commitment? Is it a question of
24 politics? What's--what is contributing to being so--

2 so far below where we have stated as a country that
3 we--we are expecting to be?

4 AVIGAIL ZIV: Sure. So last year
5 actually we did meet the number of refugees that we--
6 that the President had committed to the 70,000 or he
7 came very, very, very close. In terms of numbers of
8 ref--Syrian refugees that we're seeing, I think part
9 of it a bureaucracy, and a security issue, and the
10 impacts that you see overseas with resettlement
11 centers such as those in Jordan, and if there is a
12 security issues or concern that it kind of has a
13 ripple effect in the--the number of Syrians that you
14 start to see. Many times also Syrians need to go
15 through extra layers of background checks, and extra
16 layers to make that they are not affiliated--
17 affiliated with terrorist entities. And I think that
18 that starts to also delay the process, and make it
19 even slower. And I think also when you see states
20 that are pushing against the Refugee Resettlement
21 Program and being so vocal about it, it starts to
22 create again a rhetoric and a--a delaying and slowing
23 of those that are coming into the--to the country.
24 But I also will look to my colleagues to see if
25 there's other ideas.

2 EILEEN REILLY: It's the vetting process.
3 This process has been really especially designed to
4 target refugees from the Middle East and certainly
5 refugees with identifiably Muslim names, and they are
6 interviewed multiple times by both national security
7 officials, international security officials. That's--
8 --that's not even the USCIS. You know, it's Homeland
9 Security, it's USCIS. It's colleagues from
10 international resettlement agencies that are trying
11 to do various part of the process that are contracted
12 to. There's blood tests. There's DNA. There's a
13 lot of family trees. It's compared against every
14 record that's ever been made anywhere on earth about
15 this person, and then you have to be able to prove
16 all of this, and you're a refugee. You have fled,
17 you know, with the--with the clothes on your back,
18 you know, and have fished out of the Mediterranean
19 and yet you're supposed to be able to, you know,
20 prove, you know, produce birth certificates, et
21 cetera, et cetera. So as I said in my comments, the
22 people who get through this process are the most
23 vetted of--of any entrants to the United States, and
24 I think what needs to happen is more resources could
25 be put towards it. If there is nothing that could be

2 done about the process, they could certainly be a lot
3 more people doing it.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Uh-huh.

5 AVIGAIL ZIV: You know, they really
6 haven't hired sufficient numbers of people to the
7 problem.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: And you used the
9 world ossified, correct?

10 AVIGAIL ZIV: Yeah, ossified. The
11 pipeline simply doesn't work. It's--it's--it's, you
12 know, it's ossified by all of this bureaucracy, and
13 the people who are arriving now, the numbers of
14 Syrians who have arrived in 2016 they started this
15 process two years ago at a minimum.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Okay.

17 AVIGAIL ZIV: Yeah.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you. Thank
19 you very much to this panel.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank--thank you
21 to the panel, and--and again as--as--as we--as we
22 continue the conversation let's make sure that we
23 continue to connect the dots on the--the massive
24 immigration serve--list of services that we give in
25 the city and make sure that we're--we're--we're

2 making that connection as we fight for summer camps,
3 and as we--as we--as we fight for adult education, we
4 need to--we need to tell that whole story, and it's
5 not different, and I think the--the World Refugee--
6 Refugee Day last week had some pretty simple
7 messages. The refugees are no different than us at
8 all, and they need the same things that we need in
9 our community, and that's when we start removing the
10 walls and the barriers. So thank you all for--for
11 coming in and telling your story. We're going to
12 hear from one more panel. We're going to hear from
13 one panel on the Syrian Refugee crisis, and then
14 we're going to go over to the Ecuadorian Reso, and
15 hear one panel, and then we're going to alternate
16 just to make sure that we get everybody's voices
17 heard and we have your--your names here. Next panel
18 Ms. Benson, please, from Safe Passage Project;
19 Matthew Kennis from the--the Libertas Center for
20 Human Rights; Kelly Agnew Barajas, Catholic
21 Charities; Rebecca Kirschner HIAS. Please join us.
22 We're going to give you three minutes on the clock.
23 If you have testimony that's longer than three
24 minutes, please give us a summary and we'll go right
25 into questions after your--your testimony.

2 PROFESSOR LENNI BENSON: So, Council
3 Member, did you want me to go first?

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Actually, yes, Ms.
5 Benson, please go ahead.

6 PROFESSOR LENNI BENSON: So I have long
7 written testimony. Being a law professor, I can't
8 help myself. So you now--

9 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [interposing] Give
10 us your top--give your top points.

11 PROFESSOR LENNI BENSON: You should
12 copies of it.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much.

14 PROFESSOR LENNI BENSON: If you turn to
15 page 5 of the testimony, I took all the statistics I
16 could find of the refugees admissions of the United
17 States, and so as the prior panel was speaking to
18 you, the numbers last were 69,975 out of the
19 designated 70,000. But when I was refreshed and
20 doing my research to prepare these remarks for you is
21 that when the Balkans Crisis was ongoing, the United
22 States has admissions of over 100,000, 122,000. I
23 think the top year the President designated in '93
24 was 145,000. So when we're asking today in your
25 resolution and calling of the federal government for

2 a greater expansion of refugee admissions, we're not
3 doing anything unusual or impossible. I didn't put
4 into my testimony that I'd be happy if you need help
5 finding the comparative countries. I can tell you
6 for example that Sweden, the country much smaller
7 than ourselves, expected 160,000 applicants for
8 refugee admission. But I do think the prior panel
9 also made important distinctions on the United States
10 the way to integrate, and I think that's the focus of
11 your discussion here today. And so, if I could, I
12 wanted to say that I think this is a complex area of
13 law to master. The organizations that serve refugee
14 resettlement are often separate and apart. They're
15 excellent, but they're often separate and apart from
16 the groups that are providing assistance to those
17 seeking asylum in the United States. And yet, once
18 you're granted asylum, some of the same public
19 benefits are available to you. Not as much financial
20 assistance. So, I would urge the City Council as
21 we're learning and thinking about immigrant
22 integration to not forget that New York has, as you
23 know, and as you're so excellently doing, supporting
24 legal services for immigrants that the asylees,
25 people who have managed to come to our border, knock

2 and the door, and are put into the removal process,
3 and then are seeking asylum. or people who entered
4 lawfully and then seek protection. They also need
5 integration and language support, education and
6 housing, et cetera. So in my written testimony I
7 couldn't but help but say exactly one of the examples
8 that was given to you a moment ago. And yes, I
9 completely support the Syrian resolution. But what I
10 do with the Safe Passage Project is primarily focus
11 on what is called the other refugee crisis, which are
12 the Central Americans and the youth coming at the
13 border. So in the end in my testimony I do ask you
14 to think about a couple of additional resolutions. I
15 hope I'm not out of order. One is a resolution
16 calling on the federal government as we're going for
17 the Ecuadorians for TPS, for Central America, and
18 I've given you a link to a letter that dozens and
19 dozens of law professors and I know religious
20 organizations have signed calling on the President
21 for protection, going to the endemic, systemic
22 violence in that region. The example to you earlier
23 was [bell] what if the Dominican was it, in
24 disruption where we have this with the five--three of
25 the five most dangerous countries in the world on our

2 southern border. And we're looking at maybe reaching
3 60,000 children this year. I think I should stop for
4 time, but I am--I have been a law professor for over
5 30 years in the field. So if I can answer questions
6 on the technical legal issues or the historical
7 framework, I'd be happy to do that. [pause]

8 MATTHEW KENNIS: Thank you, Chair
9 Menchaca and Council Members Levin and Ferreras-
10 Copeland for this opportunity. My name is Matthew
11 Kennis and I'm the Program Director with the Libertas
12 Center for Human Rights at Elmhurst Hospital. We
13 serve and help to address the multi-faceted needs of
14 immigrants and refugees in Queens and throughout the
15 city who have survived torture and persecution in
16 their home countries in particular. I'd like to tell
17 you briefly about our work, some of the challenges we
18 face as well as some concrete areas where additional
19 help would be welcome. On an annual basis, our
20 current program--our program serves about 130 torture
21 survivors who come from about 60 countries. Seventy-
22 five percent of our clients are between the ages of
23 19 and 44. Twenty percent of our clients are from
24 the LGBT community. Forty percent have survived
25 sexual violence or rape. Seventy-five percent have

2 survived physical torture, and 90% or higher have
3 survived psychological torture, death threats, and
4 other forms psychological abuse leading to very high
5 levels of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and major
6 depression. As I said earlier, 90% of our clients
7 are currently seeking asylum, and I'd like focus a
8 little bit on the particular challenges facing asylum
9 seekers. We aid survivors' rehabilitation by providing
10 a combination of medical, mental health, case
11 management and legal services to address clients'
12 tightly interwoven needs with success in each area
13 dependent of the others. The stress of survivors'
14 legal proceedings and separation from family
15 profoundly affects their already fragile mental
16 health status. Psychological symptoms, which can
17 exacerbate or present as medical symptoms are often a
18 barrier to the needed but potentially traumatizing
19 recounting of their persecution during their asylum
20 hearings. Without work authorizations, survivors
21 struggle to meet their concrete needs, but without
22 access to social services, asylum seekers have
23 trouble accessing clothing, transportation and
24 language skills, and have difficulty getting a job.
25 In New York City there may be as many as 75,000

2 torture survivors. It will be no surprise to you to
3 hear that one of our challenges and limitations is
4 seeking funding for our own capacity to expand
5 services, but I'd like to focus on a few concrete
6 issues where our clients would benefit from
7 additional help, and I think you've heard some of
8 these a little bit already. Unstable or poor housing
9 options. Our clients often live in overcrowded
10 apartments or in situations where landlords take
11 advantage or withhold basic services such as running
12 water or toilets. Additional support to educate
13 about tenant's rights, or provide further housing
14 protections would be very beneficial. The need for
15 subsidized transportation. Many clients survive on
16 very little income and struggle to afford the most
17 basic expenses. This, of course creates challenges
18 for accessing work opportunities and consistently
19 attending doctor's appointments. Access to free or
20 subsidized childcare. [bell] Our clients,
21 especially women, regularly face challenges in
22 security affordable childcare especially in the
23 summer months when children are out of school. And,
24 of course, as others have mentioned, learning English
25 is a high priority for most of our clients in order

2 to find work, gain independence and reduce isolation.
3 But paid courses can be extremely difficult to
4 attend, and expensive and, therefore, out of reach.
5 So, of course, more ESL classes at libraries or
6 community centers as well as shorter waiting lists
7 would be extremely beneficial. I thank you for this
8 opportunity, and would be very happy to answer any
9 questions you may have., and would be very happy to
10 answer any questions you may have.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much.

12 KELLY AGNEW-BARAJAS: Good afternoon. My
13 name is Kelly Agnew-Barajas, I'm the Director of
14 Refugee Settlement at Catholic Charities and the
15 Archdiocese of New York. Thank you today for having
16 us and for bringing these important issues to the
17 fore. Catholic Charities Community Services,
18 Immigrant and Refugee Services Division works with
19 immigrants from all over the world to meet their
20 legal, social service and education as well as
21 employment needs. We provide accurate information,
22 and protect immigrants from exploitation and abuse,
23 reunite families, offer education and employment
24 services, welcome and integrate newcomers into our
25 communities. Last year we served over 8,000

2 immigrants with legal representation, reunited
3 families, answered calls, over 25--28,000 calls for
4 help, and 7,000 immigrants received English
5 instruction. In my particular department refugee
6 settlement served 900 asylees, refugees, victims of
7 trafficking, Cuban and Haitian, entrants and parolees
8 as well as unaccompanied minors primarily from
9 Central America. There are currently--without
10 counting internally displaced refugees--there are
11 currently more 20 million refugees worldwide, 22% of
12 whom are Syrians. Over the past five years as the
13 conflict--conflict has raged on, 4.8 million Syrians
14 have fled and are now refugees. While the vast
15 majority, as we all know, are in the Middle East,
16 only a tiny fraction are identified as being eligible
17 for the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program. It's
18 important to reiterate, as my colleagues earlier
19 have, that the U.S. Refugee Program admits refugees
20 who have gone through a step-by-step very rigorous
21 security and vetting process, which typically last
22 again two years. In the U.S. Refugee Program, the
23 most vulnerable cases are prioritized, women, head of
24 households, the elderly, people who have disabilities
25 and families. Of the 85,000 refugees who are to be

2 resettled by the U.S. this particular year, 10,000
3 were to be from Syria. However, the arrival to date
4 has fallen far short of that goal. In 2017,
5 President Barack Obama and Senator--I'm sorry--
6 Secretary of State John Carey have already identified
7 that the target would be 100,000 as a goal. It's an
8 increase of 15,000 over this current ceiling, but the
9 number of Syrians has not been identified as of yet.
10 Catholic Charities supports Resolution 1105-A calling
11 for at least 65,000 Syrians to be included in that
12 refugee target for next year. As an agency, we stand
13 ready to do more. Catholic Charities, local state
14 and federal partners along with our network of
15 parishes and volunteers, we already welcome and
16 integrate refugees from all over the world. [bell]
17 Refugees become the newest New Yorkers, our
18 neighbors, our co-workers and our friends. Catholic
19 Charities is in full support of increasing the
20 resettlement of Syrians, and is committed to
21 providing holistic resettlement services. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And I know your
23 testimony also has a piece of Ecuadorian--

24 KELLY AGNEW-BARAJAS: We do.
25

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Can--can you just
3 state for the record. I know it's always here, but
4 here--

5 KELLY AGNEW-BARAJAS: [interposing]
6 Absolutely.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: --but just for a
8 quick second.

9 KELLY AGNEW-BARAJAS: Thank you. Glad to
10 go over time. More than two months ago a disastrous
11 earthquake struck--struck Ecuador. 661 people were
12 killed and more than 8,000 people were injured.
13 Countless buildings in communities were destroyed,
14 and the country is struggling to deal with the
15 aftermath even as aftershocks continue to rock the
16 country. In keeping with the core belief that all
17 people be treated with compassion, and protected in
18 their time of need, we believe it is important that
19 the U.S. consider extending TPS to Ecuadorian
20 Nationals residing in the U.S. TPS is an immigration
21 benefit granted to nationals of foreign countries
22 that have experienced a disaster or conflict, it
23 makes it too dangerous for them to return home.
24 Since the April 16th, earth--earthquake, Ecuadorian
25 community--the Ecuadorian community has come together

2 to spearhead relief efforts in the U.S.--throughout
3 the U.S. If TPS is granted Ecuadorian immigrants
4 present in the U.S. will be able to apply for
5 permission and work legally and support the important
6 work of rebuilding their country. Thank you.

7 REBECCA KIRSCHNER: My name is Rebecca
8 Kirschner, and I'm the Director of Campaigns for
9 HIAS. HIAS would like to thank Council Members
10 Steven Levin and Carlos--and Carlos Menchaca for
11 introduction Resolution 1105-A and for the
12 opportunity to testify today. HIAS was founded in
13 1881 here in New York City in order to assist the
14 ways of the Eastern European Jews immigrating to the
15 United States. Today, HIAS is a Jewish that works in
16 the U.S. and globally for the protection of refugees
17 regardless of their race, religion or nationality.
18 We are one of the nine agencies that partners with
19 the federal government to resettle refugees, and we
20 also have office and programs all over the world.
21 For HIAS assisting refugees honors the history of
22 Jews in this country as well as our central Jewish
23 value of welcoming the stranger. Resolution 1105
24 speaks to the urgency of a true global crisis. There
25 are now 65 million people who were forced to flee

2 their homes due to conflict, violence and persecution
3 and the numbers keep growing. Every single day
4 another 40,000 people flee somewhere in the world in
5 search of safety. Out of those, one-half are
6 children. In a very short time the Syrian Civil War
7 has yielded the largest single population of refugees
8 in the world--in the world today many of whom are the
9 victims of terrorism and extremism. The stories of
10 their difficult and dangerous journeys have captured
11 the attention of the world. The United States can
12 play a critical role in helping this population by
13 providing assistance to the countries that are
14 hosting millions of refugees such as Jordan and
15 Lebanon, and by resettling some of the most
16 vulnerable refugees who are unable to live in those
17 countries in safety. Here in New York City the
18 Statue of Liberty bears witness to a long American
19 tradition of welcoming refugees. The United States
20 has offered protection to generations of those who
21 came to our shores in search of safety, freedom, and
22 the chance of a new life. Throughout history,
23 arriving refugees became active and productive
24 members of American communities, and their impact on
25 the cultural and economic fabric of this country is

2 immeasurable. For this reason, we are discouraged by
3 the attempts by national, state and local governments
4 to pause or shut down refugee resettlement in the
5 name of national security. The misinformation
6 circulating is outrageous. Many refugees themselves
7 are victims--are victims of terrorism, and the
8 refugees are vetted and screened at a much higher
9 level than any other entrants to the United States.
10 The Jewish community has spoken out strongly in
11 support of Syrian refugees. Most notably, over 1,200
12 rabbis signed a letter to the U.S. Government in
13 support of Syrian refugees back in December. That
14 letter included over 250 rabbis from New York alone,
15 and in addition dozens of New York City synagogues
16 have signed onto HIAS' Welcome Campaign in just the
17 past few months, rising very urgently to support
18 Syrian resettlement in the United States. Part of
19 the reasons for the strong Jewish response is in this
20 moment is the terrible understanding that our
21 community has seen this happen before. In the late
22 1930s, [bell] there was a similar political
23 conversation happening in the United States, although
24 the topic was Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Europe.
25 The American public and many of our national leaders

2 felt that the refugees posed a threat to national
3 security, and many people's applications were denied
4 including notably the family of Anne Frank. In that
5 moment the U.S. could not tell the difference between
6 the victims and the per--the victims and the
7 perpetrators of violence. It is imperative that we
8 do not make a similar mistake again. Thank you again
9 for the opportunity to testify.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much,
11 and if we can make space for Dr. Georgette Bennett if
12 you can--you can come up here please, and we're going
13 to add you to this panel, and as--as you get
14 situated, I want to also welcome Council Member Danny
15 Dromm from Queens. He's here with us today, and if
16 you can begin with your testify as well. Thank you.

17 [background comments, pause]

18 GEORGETTE BENNETT: Thank you very much.
19 I'm Georgette Bennett, founder of the Multi-Faith
20 Alliance for Syrian Refugees and the Tanenbaum Center
21 for Religious Understanding of which MSA is a part.
22 I'm a Jew. I'm child of Holocaust survivors and a
23 refugee myself. My parents and I arrived in this
24 country with the designation "stateless" written on
25 the passenger manifest of the ship that brought us to

2 New York. So, for all these reasons I have felt to
3 compelled to act in the face of the immense suffering
4 of the Syrian people. Resolution 1105 is consistent
5 with the administration's commitment to admit at
6 least 10,000 Syrian refugees in the current fiscal
7 year as well as America's historical commitment to
8 take in half of the worldwide number called for by
9 UNHCR. But those of us who are sympathetic to the
10 cause of Syrian refugees are operating in a hostile
11 political climate, and that is the single greatest
12 obstacle to the UN maintaining its historical
13 leadership and resettling these particular refugees,
14 the Syrians. So I want to spend my few minutes
15 before this committee to provide you with information
16 with ammunition, if you will, that will help you
17 counter the religious prejudice that underlies so
18 much of the anti-refugee rhetoric we hear today. I'm
19 going to just summarize my myths and facts, but I
20 refer you to the unabridged version, which has just
21 been circulated to you.

22 So the greatest fears about Syrian
23 refugees are that they are terrorists, that they are
24 going to be a drain on our economy, and that they--
25 that Muslims will overrun our country. And I think

2 the most powerful argument against all of that is to
3 cite the 86,000 Syrians who already live in the U.S.
4 We have a history with them. They came in an earlier
5 wave of immigration. They're median income is
6 \$62,000 a year, which is the highest of any foreign
7 born group in the U.S. Forty-nine percent of Syrian
8 men work in high skilled occupations. Thirty-nine
9 percent of Syrians are highly educated. They are
10 college educated. The U.S. native born population
11 only 30% are college educated. The Syrians who have
12 been accepted in our country during the years of the--
13 --the Syrian Civil War make up only a tiny, tiny,
14 tiny fraction of the population, and adding 10,000 or
15 65,000 additional refugees still makes it a tiny,
16 tiny, tiny percentage. Of the 750,000 refugees who
17 have been resettled in the U.S. since 9/11, fewer
18 than ten [bell] have been implicated in terrorist
19 incidents. None of those Syrians. Again, there is
20 much information than what has been circulated to
21 you, and during the Q&A, I have some additional
22 answers to some of the questions that you asked the
23 previous panel, if that would be helpful.

24 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much
25 for, and we're going to go into questions, and

2 remember the next panel will be an Ecuador--
3 Ecuadorian community organization panel on the TPS
4 question. My--my--my question to Mr. Matthew Kennis,
5 you--you reminded us and it--it should be told today
6 is a very historic day for the LGBT community.
7 President Obama and the Administration has designated
8 the first monumental landmark here for Stonewall
9 specially in New York, the first of its kind. And
10 when we think about refugees we also think about our
11 LGBT refugees. Can you tell us a little bit about
12 any of the struggle and the work that needs to be at
13 the forefront of our community response in
14 integrating our LGBT Syrian refugees, and just tell
15 us a little bit about that. We just want to make
16 sure we don't--or that we acknowledge the work that--
17 that brings us here in New York City?

18 MATTHEW KENNIS: Thank you very much. As
19 I mentioned, yes about 20% of our clients are from
20 the LGBT community, and on top of typically being
21 asylum seekers with all the challenges that comes
22 with facing that, and being torture survivors with
23 all of this medical and psychological symptoms and
24 triggering that can create challenges on a daily
25 basis. Many of our clients have actually come

2 through detention, and LGBT clients in detention have
3 additional challenges on top of that: Discrimination
4 and not full understanding especially members of the
5 transgender community. People in the detention
6 system, abuse. These are some of the--the kinds of
7 challenges that people face when they're ultimately
8 and hopefully able to get out of detention and go
9 through the asylum process. But we know with general
10 discrimination that the LGBT community faces despite
11 the--the warm and open arms that this city has
12 symbolically and the way it signals support for the
13 community. There are still attacks, and this is one
14 of the things that we have to continue fight in some
15 of the daily work that we do at our center with our
16 supportive counseling and case management and the
17 other services that our clients provide, we talk
18 through some of these questions of am I really safe
19 here? Do--where can I go if I am attacked? So, for
20 example, we partner with the LGBT Center in the city,
21 which also provides a very safe space. They run
22 trauma groups and other supportive services, and
23 refer back and for to our program when some of their
24 services run out. There are additional mental health

2 services that are provided at Elmhurst Hospital and
3 some of the other hospitals throughout the city.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you for
5 that. Council Member Levin.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you very
7 much. Mr. Kennis, I just had a--a question for you
8 as well. You mentioned access to free or subsidized
9 childcare options. New York City obviously has some
10 subsidized childcare whether through vouchers or
11 center based childcare, and often that requires a
12 public assistance case to be opened. What is the
13 main obstacle that--is--is that they--they're--
14 they're not able to open a PA case at--at--at the
15 time that they're with your--with your--your center?

16 MATTHEW KENNIS: To my understanding the--
17 the particular challenge is asylum seekers. All of--
18 accessing benefits there's additional kind of hoops
19 you have to go through. So where as challenging as it
20 will be for refugees who receive refugee status and
21 are resettled in the U.S., those that have come to
22 the door who are seeking asylum, their access to
23 benefits within the city are reduced. Not actually--
24 excuse me--not within the city per se but within the
25 country. So if it's opening a PA case or being more

2 familiar with all of the services that are available
3 to them, this is one of the things we keep hearing
4 from our clients--

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: [interposing]
6 Right.

7 MATTHEW KENNIS: --is we can't get
8 childcare. We don't know where to find it. We're
9 having trouble getting it, and therefore, we have
10 trouble in--in, you know, advancing in our healthcare
11 or other areas.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: So, I'm happy to--
13 I'm as--I'm also the chair of the General Welfare
14 Committee, which oversee ACS and HRA, and I would be
15 very happy to work with you and your clients to match
16 you up with ACS and HRA and make sure that any
17 bureaucratic hurdles that they're facing could be
18 eliminated and there's--to be honest, there's--
19 there's in addition to the federal funded childcare
20 through--through the federal government, we also have
21 some city funded childcare options as well. So, you
22 know, with the relatively limited number of--of
23 clients you're working with--

24 MATTHEW KENNIS: [interposing] Right.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: --I think that
3 that should be something that can be easily addressed
4 within the city's resources itself.

5 MATTHEW KENNIS: Thank you very much, and
6 if I could just add one other thing. In the context
7 of the discussion of Syrian refugees, I understand
8 that I'm speaking about a relatively small number of
9 torture survivors. But one of the things that
10 informs our work is a--is a meta study, a meta
11 analysis done by the Center--Center for Victims of
12 Torture last year that estimates that up to 44% of
13 all refugees in the United States are torture
14 survivors. So this isn't a narrow issue per se, but
15 one that we should be thinking in consort with the
16 discussion around refugee resettlement.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you and then
18 also I just wanted to add that I think it's---as
19 person of Jewish heritage, I want to thank this
20 panel, those of you that are--are advocating on
21 behalf of Jewish organizations or--or self-identified
22 as Jewish yourself that--it's so important that the
23 Jewish community also speak up loudly and clearly as
24 well. Thank you.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. I'm
3 going to hand it over to Council Member Dromm, and
4 also welcome Council Member Mathieu Eugene from
5 Brooklyn.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Thank you, Chair
7 Menchaca. It's good to be here, and it's really
8 important that we hold this hearing. First of all,
9 I'm going to just state that I have been out
10 supporting and ask for TPS for our Ecuadorian
11 brothers and sisters. I have attended a number of
12 press conferences and also, you know, sent some
13 letters on that issue as well. This issue of the
14 Syrian refugees is one of particular interest and
15 concern to me as well. In fact, you were correct to
16 talk a little bit about LGBT issues within the
17 refugees community, and I don't know if everybody is
18 aware, but I am certainly very proud that the Grand
19 Marshal for the New York City Pride Parade yesterday
20 was a Syrian refugee by the name of Subi Nahas (sp?)
21 and he really led the troops yesterday so to speak,
22 and was just wonderful, and I just really applaud the
23 selection of him so that he could highlight the issue
24 of Syrian refugees in this country. So LGBT people
25 stand in solidarity with the Syrian people as well,

2 and--and I just think that was important. Now, in
3 regard to the United States taking 10,000 Syrian
4 refugees, it's a very small number when you think
5 about it. Okay, this country has what, over 300
6 million people here, and now I know it hasn't worked
7 perfectly in some of the European countries, but the
8 UK did commit to taking 20,000. Ireland committed to
9 taking at least 4,000, some estimates up to 10,000.
10 If those countries can take 10 or 20,000 and--and I
11 guess that there have been problems within
12 limitation, but nevertheless, we should be talking
13 about a much larger number than 10,000 refugees
14 considering the impact of this humanitarian crisis
15 that's happening to the Syrian people. So I--I just
16 wanted to get that on the record as well, but I do
17 want to just go back to the LGBT question. So what
18 if the agencies--and--and--and the reason why and I
19 think I've asked this question before, how--how do
20 you go about the screening. Maybe Libertas might--
21 might be able to--how do you deal with screening
22 because it's a very tricky situation, and Subi Nahas
23 could tell you probably. Coming from a country
24 where--where homosexuality is considered so bad, it
25 can almost re-traumatize somebody if they come and

2 they're asked a question about are you gay, and, you
3 know. So how do you go about dealing with that
4 issue? I'm--I'm just curious to know, and maybe the
5 other agencies as well. I think Catholic Charities
6 was talking about a large number of asylum folks at
7 another hearing that we had, and--and they were
8 working with the LGBT issue as well. So I'm just
9 curious to know if--if somebody of the panel could
10 address that.

11 GEORGETTE BENNETT: If--if I could just
12 jump in for a moment, I think it's useful to know
13 that there is an organization that is deeply involved
14 in screening call IRAP and their focus is very much
15 on the LGBT community, and they are very helpful in
16 terms of helping that community get through the
17 scheme--the screening process.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: What's it called?

19 GEORGETTE BENNETT: International
20 Refugees Assistance Program made up primarily of
21 volunteer lawyers, but a highly respected and widely
22 recognized organization.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Yes.

24 MATTHEW KENNIS: If I could quickly
25 respond to the--Council Member Dromm. You're

2 absolutely right that recounting your story, you're
3 talking about your identity can be in many cases re-
4 trauma--re-traumatizing and challenging. At the
5 Libertas Center one of the things we do is we conduct
6 medical and psychological evaluations and write
7 affidavits for individual asylum cases, and in some--
8 there are times when clients who are from the LGBT
9 community are not in a position to talk about it
10 explicitly, and we have to find ways that we can get
11 across the challenges and the reasons for their
12 persecution without going beyond what they're willing
13 to say publicly. We're in testimony because that
14 could be too difficult for them, but there are other
15 ways in which this is very challenging. For many
16 asylum seekers in particular coming to New York or
17 other places, they--they're typ--typically they would
18 find housing within members of the community
19 relatives and others where their identity may not be
20 public, and this continues to be a challenge. They
21 have to hide who they are in order have housing,
22 which can re-traumatize them, and make it difficult
23 to them--for them to make recovery. So housing is
24 one of the critical elements that can help to put
25 people on the road to recovery especially those from

2 the LGBT community who may not be safe or comfortable
3 being fully out in their community.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: And just on that
5 issue, too, you know, I was in my office one day when
6 at about 5 o'clock a former student of mine arrived,
7 17 years old. Had just been thrown out of his house
8 by his parents because he begun--had begun to seek
9 asylum, and come out to his parents, and no longer
10 had a place to live, and came to me to ask me to find
11 him a place to sleep that night, which was just
12 incredible and difficult to do. Fortunately, in the
13 long run we were able to assist him, but the issue
14 was for him because as you know with asylum in order--
15 -in which to begin to claim that. So this student
16 had been here since he was in at least fourth grade
17 when I had him, and now he's 17 years old. The whole
18 issue of when one realizes their sexuality, and
19 unfortunately I think in New York we at least have
20 some judges who are sympathetic to the idea that one
21 may not begin to realize their sexuality until later
22 on. And that then, you know, because he knew, he--I
23 guess he started to come out when he was about 16.
24 So he fit into that framework. So I think it's
25 really important that all of our organizations

2 consider all of these factors into the interview
3 techniques that we use when we first meet with people
4 who are seeking asylum. Thank you. I really
5 appreciate that, and again I could not be more proud
6 of Subi Nahas yesterday in the Pride Parade.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: That was
8 definitely a beautiful moment for us all, and so the
9 last thing I want to say to the panel, and thank you
10 so much for your testimony. The--the information,
11 the statistics, the--the texture of this conversation
12 I think just boils to even if in--in a moment where
13 just talk about LGBT community as part of the refugee
14 community, the amount of compassion that is required
15 for us all to summon in ourselves as individuals, as
16 organizations, as government to be able to address
17 that one person can actually have an impact on the
18 whole system. That's what we're trying to do here,
19 and that every human life that crosses our--our
20 government's opportunity for inclusion and
21 integration offers us that ability--that ability and
22 opportunity to change our system so that we have a
23 full compassionate system. That's what we're trying
24 to talk about today, and I want to thank you all for

2 your solidarity and your work, and continued
3 conversation will happen. So thank you so much.

4 PANEL MEMBER: [off mic] Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Our next panel,
6 and this is for Reso 1103. We're moving over to TPS,
7 Protection for Ecuador and Ecuadorians. The first is
8 Cynthia Boca from Make the Road; Miguel Marlow, Faith
9 in New York; Julius Oriano (sp?), Cesar Lozano from
10 Progress and Accion, and then Walter Sinche from the
11 International Ecuadorian Alliance. If you can please
12 come over to the table. [background comments, pause]
13 And we are having additional panels of refugees--
14 Syrian Refugee Resolution after this. And so, we'll--
15 --we'll be alternating. I want to make sure that we
16 give voices on both of these resolutions throughout--
17 throughout the next few hours, and thank you for your
18 patience and for being here. This is part of our
19 conversation together. These both resos--both of
20 these resolutions offer an opportunity for us a
21 community to unite as we're confronted with these
22 very, very important federal actions that New York
23 City will be playing a big role in with our voice.
24 If we can start from the right.

25 CYNTHIA BOCA: [Speaking Spanish]

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [Speaking Spanish]

3 MIGUEL MARLOW: [Speaking Spanish]

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [Speaking Spanish]

5 JULIUS ORIANO: Good afternoon. Thank
6 you for the opportunity to address this important
7 issue in our community to you Mr. Menchaca and to the
8 other council members of the city of New York, and
9 also on your--on your behalf to the Mayor Bill de
10 Blasio for the pronounced support to the Ecuadorian
11 community. Why it's important, TPS for our
12 community? It's because not only of the earthquake
13 that happens on April 16th in Ecuador it because of
14 the--also thousands of people that we live here in
15 the U.S. that also avoid deportation most of them
16 have been here for years that also can affect if
17 they've deported to Ecuador. This issue that--that
18 you're going to take place--that you're going to
19 present to the--to the--the rest of the council
20 members at the preliminary, we hope that they reach
21 to the federal level that would recognize not only
22 the city of New York also the--the whole country.
23 How important? It's our community, our not only
24 Ecuadorian community but our Latino community not
25 only on the economical side, but on the political

2 down the road. If we get at a certain level we're
3 going to get the papers. We're going to get
4 documented. We're going to vote for our leadership.
5 So thanks for once again stepping up for our
6 community, and we are--we are grateful. We thank you
7 very much for this support.

8 CESAR LOZANO: [Speaking Spanish]

9 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Gracias for your
10 testimony.

11 WALTER SINCHE: [Speaking Spanish]

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [Speaking Spanish]

13 WALTER SINCHE: [Speaking Spanish]

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [Speaking Spanish]

15 WALTER SINCHE: Okay, sure.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: What I--just in
17 translation what I'm asking is in the time that we
18 have right now in waiting for TPS to come down from
19 President Obama and the Administration, how can we as
20 a city support our families, Ecuadorian families and
21 brother sisters here in New York City? What can we
22 do as a city?

23 JULIUS ORIANO: Well, that's a very good
24 question. Obviously this is--what--what you're doing
25 today it's about an important step to bring us a

2 little bit more security that we know that the city
3 and the elected officials are kind of supporting us
4 to get at least a temporary legalization, but at some
5 point our own community also has to be activated to
6 be behind you. And as soon you--you tell us to do
7 something that we have to take some actions, our
8 community has to also be ready to support any action
9 that will lead to the--to get the TPS on a federal
10 level.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you for
12 that, and--and we will as soon as we find out
13 exactly. I think that's an important part is to
14 mobilize and to be ready to stay united in this front
15 and this fight. New York City is the largest in--in
16 the United States and we're speaking with one voice
17 when we pass this resolution in this room here. We--
18 we transform this room, and this is where we pass our
19 laws and legislation, and in this room you'll see us
20 council members say yes to this resolution, and
21 that's going to have that power and effect. But when
22 we find more opportunities for you to stand with us,
23 when we ask Obama to finally make that decision
24 sooner rather than later, you will be with us and we
25 will be together.

2 WALTER SINCHE: Thank you, Mr. Menchaca.
3 Also on this very important step that you're--you're
4 taking as a solid--solidarity to this humanitarian
5 issue. Thank you.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MENCHACA: Thank you and
7 the final thing that I want to say is that I'm just
8 reminded of all the services that we have right now
9 at our disposal and--and thanks to this budget we're
10 increasing so many dollars in our immigrant
11 communities, but Action NYC and the key to the city
12 are programs that the city comes together in the
13 middle of communities like in Corona or Sunset Park,
14 and that's where we will be able to utilize legal
15 services when TPS becomes available. And so know
16 that we are--we are getting ready to--to make that
17 happen because lawyers will be needed and other
18 social services will be needed, and we will be here
19 with you. So know that we're thinking about that as
20 well, and that you are not alone, and that you are
21 not alone, and that we send every family affected in
22 Ecuador and Ecuador specifically and the families
23 that were affected here all our love and support.

24 WALTER SINCHE: Thank you so much.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, thank you.

3 Our next panel we will be speaking on 1105, the
4 Syrian Refugee Resolution. Murad Awawdeh from NYIC;
5 Professor Moju Bobbi; Olufunke Okome from Brooklyn
6 College, Department of Political Science; Labelah
7 (sp?) Latif, Black Institute; Kiva Al Rahawan, the
8 Arab-American Association. [pause] And if we can
9 have George Heroshi (sic) come talk to our general--
10 our--our Immigration Counsel here to the left. Thank
11 you. You can begin. [pause]

12 YBARA HAWAN: [Speaking foreign language]
13 My mane is Ybara Hawan (sic) and I'm 20 years old.
14 I'm from Syria and I'm a community remember--member
15 from the Arab-American Association of New York. I
16 came here as a refugee from three months ago with my
17 family, and we were one of the lucky families to be
18 welcome in--into the United States. I often think
19 about those who are left behind, my own family, my
20 mother's family and my father's family. Family is so
21 important for us, and the soul--it makes it--it's
22 still hard--harder and harder everyday as we try to
23 adjust into a new community. I stand in front of you
24 today to plead you to work on more Syrian refugees
25 because the war is still alive in Syria, and many of

2 the children, mothers, fathers and students are still
3 dying. And whoever survives wants to com--completed
4 their studies, and exercise their basic human rights,
5 which is not to leave the few facing hunger or
6 homelessness. I stand before you to ask you to work
7 on as many refugees as you can. Let's not forget
8 that it's living in a very small Middle Eastern
9 county has 1.8 million Syrian refugees and, of
10 course, the U.S.A. as a measure of our western
11 country can work on more refugees, and remember, if
12 we don't work on them, we could be killing them.
13 Thank you so much for listening, and there are
14 council members months ago I--I'm as a student
15 refugee do not qualify for in-state tuition in New
16 York and have to waste one year of my life. I hope
17 you can help us with that. Thank you for listening.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

19 YBARA HAWAN: Thank you.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much.

21 LABELAH LATIF: Hello, my name is Labelah
22 Latif, and I'm a Research and Immigration Associate
23 at the Black Institute. The Black Institute is an
24 action and think tank that addresses economic,
25 environmental, education and immigration policy

2 through the lines of color--impacts on the
3 communities of color and other minority and women
4 groups. I'm here today because I would like to
5 highlight how many Syrians in our country have
6 contributed to our technology sector, have
7 contributed to our--to educating our children as
8 athletes and as entertainers. Paula Abdul is a
9 Canadian and American citizen, but her family was
10 originally from Syria. Steve Jobs, who's a--who was
11 the co-founder and CEO of Apple was half Syrian from
12 his biological father, and Apple is currently one the
13 biggest public companies with a profit of \$3.7
14 billion. Rosemary Barkett who was the first woman to
15 serve as Justice for the Florida Supreme Court and is
16 the first female Justice is Syrian. Her parents had
17 moved from Syria to Mexico. Jerry Seinfeld, the star
18 of the Seinfeld Show, is of Syrian origin from his
19 mother's side of the family. His maternal grand--
20 grandparents still live in Southern Brooklyn were
21 Syrian Jewish Immigrants. Kendra Hydrali (sp?) is a
22 Syrian-American artist whose artwork is in different
23 exhibitions across the U.S.A. and the Venice Bi-
24 Annual and throughout Queens. She has worked on art
25 projects for the U.S.A. Department UNICEF and has

2 been invited to speak at Harvard, MIT, Chapman and
3 UCLA at her work with Syrian refugees. Kendra was
4 named in 2012 Global Thinkers and Influencer at the
5 Rio 2012 Conference on Sustainable Development of the
6 United Nations. Her Arabic calligraphy work has been
7 used by for helping charities working with children
8 with cancer. Many are fearful that if we leave--let
9 Syrian refugees into our country, it will be a burden
10 on our economy. However, we can see that this is not
11 true. Looking at our circumstances today, there are
12 currently more than 150,000 Americans of Syrian
13 descent who earn over \$65,000 annually. Furthermore,
14 Syrian refugees do not compete with Americans for
15 jobs because as was noted earlier they are very
16 highly educated. In Canada, a country that has
17 committed to taking in 25,000 Syrian refugees, the
18 refugees are taking low skill jobs. They are not
19 taking jobs away from communities. Countries that
20 have less developed economies such as Lebanon, Jordan
21 and Brazil have accepted more refugees individually
22 than the United States of America, which is a leader
23 globally. It is time that we step up as a country
24 that was built on immigration, and accept that we are

2 all immigrants and we need to help each other. Thank
3 you.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

5 KIVA AL RAHAWAN: Good afternoon. I am
6 an African immigrant, and I came to the U.S. 35 years
7 ago, and I want to give an answer of our support to
8 the statement by the New York City Council Committee
9 on Immigration that I quote, "In New York City we
10 reject anti-immigrant sentiments, and welcome
11 displaced people with compassion, with love, respect
12 and generosity." And I support these two resolutions
13 before the Council, Resolution 1105 and 1103. As is
14 evidence of the practice is wars and conflicts and
15 persecution worldwide have caused about 60 million
16 people to be displaced, and only 1.2 million of the
17 are asylum seekers. 7.6 million Syrians, however,
18 are internationally displaced and 4.1 million are
19 refugees. The majority of them are in neighboring
20 countries, and according to the Migration Policy in
21 secret. In response to this humanitarian crisis, the
22 Obama Administration has made many promises and
23 people have referred to this, that there would be
24 10,000 admissions I think this year, and then there
25 will be an upscale until it gets to 100,000 in 2017.

2 I lived in Germany the first three years of the
3 month, and Germany has taken, you know, multiples of
4 this number in spite of the challenges that surround
5 the issue of how people receive refugees and asylees
6 all over the world. So I think the U.S. should pay
7 attention to this, and show more generosity. I also
8 support the Obama Administration's decision. I hope
9 that, you know, it's really actualized, and I applaud
10 the Administration for continuing--continuing to make
11 the U.S. a place of refuge. Because underlying the
12 prestige and the static and conflict within
13 countries, and there are vulnerable social groups.
14 They're looking for migration as their new survival,
15 and when they are weak they want safety. Whatever
16 the U.S.A. is doing, it needs to do more, as I said
17 before. I'm an African immigrant, as I said, where
18 it's good that usually also not regarded very well,
19 and we are not very welcome, but 41% of African
20 immigrants here in the U.S. have bachelor degree or
21 more. The money we earn doesn't reflect this because
22 there's discrimination. That's not the important
23 factor. The important factor is that underlying
24 situations of ethnic conflict or civil war, when they
25 have that constraint like Syrian refugees and asylum

2 seekers, they're fleeing from often genocide. Among
3 the 300 cases, I want to point out the case of the
4 Yazidi women who have been subjected to abductions,
5 brutality, sexual servitude by ISIS. Just like
6 thousands of Nigerian women and girls including the
7 Chibok girls in Nigeria. So why can't women escape
8 when they're seeking refuge? It's only right that
9 they are allowed into the U.S. and they are welcomed.
10 There is also the matter of the earthquake in Ecuador
11 and the devastation that it did upon that country,
12 and when that earthquake happened, Secretary of State
13 Kerry promised that the U.S. would do everything to help
14 and support the country and the people affected. So
15 I'm calling on the Secretary of State to remember
16 this pledge. Well, when devastating and cata--
17 catastrophes make conditions and push people out of
18 their countries, and cause them to ask for American
19 help, I believe they should be helped. I believe
20 they should be welcome. I believe they should be
21 also rescued and not rebuffed. They should be given
22 humanitarian help and all jointly, too. For all
23 these reasons, I urge the New York City Council to
24 pass Resolution 1105 and 1103. Thank you very much.

25 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

2 MALE SPEAKER: [coughs] Hello. Good
3 afternoon, Council Member Menchaca, Council Member
4 Levin, and I can't remember [off mic] and I want to
5 thank Kiva (sp?) for sharing her story because I wish
6 it was shared earlier on because this is what is at
7 the heart of this resolution and at the heart of what
8 the City Council is trying to do. My testimony is a
9 mix of both resolution. So if just bear with me, but
10 thank you for holding this hearing today to discuss
11 critical issues facing immigrants. The New York
12 Immigration Coalition is an umbrella of over 200
13 groups across the state fighting for immigrants and
14 justice. The New York Immigration Coalition strongly
15 supports Resolution 1105 calling up on the President
16 and the State Department to increase resettlement of
17 Syrian refugees from 10,000 to 65,000 by end of
18 FY2017 and Resolution 1103 calling upon the Secretary
19 of the Department of Homeland Security to designate
20 Ecuador for TPS, Temporary Protective Status to
21 provide relief for eligible Ecuadorian nationals in
22 the wake of the devastating recent earthquake.
23 Welcoming those who choose to make our city their
24 home is the core of our city, and the New York
25 Immigration Coalition works to ensure that no matter

2 where you have--where you must leave--why you must
3 leave your home, you have a new home that is
4 supportive and inclusive in New York City. This is
5 true for refugees, not only Syrian but others. Since
6 the start of the civil war, the Syrian Civil War,
7 13.5 million Syrians have become displaced and I need
8 of relief. Over 4.8 million Syrians have become
9 refugees. Countries from around the world have
10 pledged to take in Syrians. The vast majority of the
11 refugees have been taken in by surrounding countries
12 such as Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey. I'd like
13 to note that these countries are also facing other
14 refugee crises that pre-date the Syrian Civil War,
15 which include the conflict--the Palestinians, their
16 conflict and refugees including the Iraqi refugees
17 who fled after 2003 war. The western nations have
18 also stepped up and pledged--and have taken in Syrian
19 refugees. It is the duty of the united States to
20 assist refugees fleeing war. The mere 10,000 pledge
21 was not enough, and we do call upon the U.S. to do
22 more. Victims of conflict should be welcomed within
23 the a nation of immigrants. Central American
24 children and families are fleeing open warfare waged
25 by gangs and cartels. In 2014, we hit record numbers

2 of almost 6,000 unaccompanied children reunited with
3 their family in New York. Based on recent numbers,
4 we are sick on--we are on track to match the record
5 high again this year if not exceed it. In addition,
6 the number of mothers and children for 2016 so far is
7 more than double what it was in 2014, but it is also
8 true for those that are survivors or--of forced
9 migration no matter what. No--no one leaves their
10 home because it's simple or easy just because they
11 want to make the best of their life, and the lives of
12 their families in future generations. New York City
13 with the Statue of Liberty standing as a beacon in
14 our harbor has a proud history of welcome all and
15 offering shelter to those in need. The Ecuadorian
16 community is rich and thriving in New York City.
17 This community has felt the ongoing aftershocks of
18 the devastating earthquake that hit their beautiful
19 nation on April 15, 2016. Since then, 26 aftershocks
20 have rocked Ecuador, hampering and in many instances
21 postponing efforts to rebuild. Since the earthquake,
22 the community has come together to spearhead relief
23 efforts throughout the U.S. especially in the wake of
24 the aftershocks. If TPS is granted to Ecuador,
25 Ecuadorian immigrants present in the United States

2 will be able to apply for permission to stay in the
3 U.S. work legally and when necessary travel to
4 Ecuador as they begin to work to rebuild their
5 country. Ecuadorian TPS is critical to ensure that
6 communities living in the U.S. can support their
7 families, home--home country and to--home country to
8 return to its previous state. We also call upon the
9 expansion of TPS for El Salvador and Honduras that
10 would also include Guatemala. While El Salvador and
11 Honduras have been designated for TPS for the last 15
12 years, the program's strict requirement means that no
13 one has arrive in that time period or qualified to
14 apply. Despite the fact that these crimes--these
15 crime rates have dramatically risen in these three
16 countries, so much so that foreign policy experts
17 have found that conditions there are virtually the
18 same as within countries engaged in open warfare. El
19 Salvador has the highest rate of murder of women in
20 the world, and Honduras and Guatemala are within the
21 world's top most violent countries, with Honduras
22 earning the nickname Murder Capital of the World.
23 Designating the three countries to TPS would help
24 bring relief to the thousands--hundreds of thousands
25 of individuals who have been forced to flee over the

2 past ten years. In this effort, we are tremendously
3 thankful to the New York City Council and know that
4 they will make sure that any new program created in
5 New York City will be as inclusive as possible. Than
6 you.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you and for
8 our final panels. Can you make sure that the
9 microphone is on. It's a red light, that the red
10 light is on. There you go.

11 GEORGE HEROSHI: Yes. My name is George
12 Heroshi. I'm--I'm the co-president of the Japanese-
13 American Citizen's League, the New York Chapter, and
14 I just wanted to give a little historical context to
15 the situation. You know, we're a pretty old
16 organization. We've been around for 87 years, and we
17 had to endure, you know, imprisonment during World
18 War II and true prejudice, which is part of why the
19 organization wound founded in the first place. I--
20 I've actually--I'm addressing Resolution No. 1097 and
21 1105 as well, 1097 that's okay, that's, you know,
22 mixed in here.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Can--can you focus
24 actually just on 1105.

25 GEORGE HIROSHI: 1105?

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes.

3 GEORGE HIROSHI: Okay, that I'll leave
4 out. I mentioned that we have it. Yeah, first I
5 want to thank you for pushing--for trying to push
6 this through. I think it's very important. The
7 Japanese Americans, specifically the New York Chapter
8 also know as the JACL of New York, would like to go
9 on record as being in full support of Resolution
10 1105. We agree that the current laws governing the
11 granting of--of the current laws governing the status
12 quotas for allowing the settlement of Syrian refugees
13 in our country is inadequate and unfair in light of
14 extreme and life threatening circumstances that they
15 are facing. The JACL is America's oldest Asian civil
16 rights organization founded in 1927. The Japanese-
17 American community has endured some of the most
18 extreme examples of prejudice and exclusion in this
19 country's history. Incarceration of 120,000 people
20 of Japanese heritage during World War II was preceded
21 by the exclusion after 1924 and is the inequality
22 against immigrants which fostered the type of hostile
23 hate mongering that is currently being experienced by
24 those of Muslim and Arab descent. The JACL of New
25 York is very concerned that we do not repeat the

2 mistakes of the past. As a free society, the values
3 of this country are based on racial equality
4 tolerance. The people that are applying for asylum
5 in this country are in desperate need and looking
6 towards America to show compassion and to live up to
7 our ideals. The JACL of New York believes that it is
8 extremely important that both the--that Resolution
9 1105 is submitted for consideration by the United
10 States Congress. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank
12 you so much, and really the--the--the one thing I
13 just want to say as I listened to the whole panel
14 and--and thinking about history, and thinking where--
15 where this country has in the past responded, and in
16 some ways with open arms and in some ways--some ways
17 without open arms. I want to thank each and every
18 one of you for continuing to speak up, and speak for
19 your community both, you know, the kind of personal
20 experiences, but also as a community. And, as we
21 think about how we move forward, I want us to always
22 remember not just what we spoke about today, but what
23 our--what our organizations are doing on the ground,
24 and making sure that government hears that. Which is
25 why we're opening the doors to this conversation in

2 this room here today in this committee, and ask what
3 we can do as council members that represent you on
4 the ground. Because that represent--representation
5 goes up, all the way up to the--to the federal
6 government, and our Congress will listen us because
7 we're part of that. We're part of that one group,
8 that one--this one government system. So, I just
9 want to thank you for your testimony. I just want to
10 make sure that Council Member Levin asks his
11 questions as well. Thank you.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: [pause] I just
13 want to thank this panel for your very helpful
14 testimony, and for telling your personal stories, and
15 for this very, very important work that your
16 organizations are doing as well. We greatly
17 appreciate all of the work that you're doing,
18 especially on this. Al Rahawan.

19 KIVA AL RAHAWAN: Yes.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: I just want to
21 thank you very much for telling your story, and for
22 showing all--everybody's that's watching and
23 everybody that's paying attention that, you know, how
24 dignified you are, and how--how well informed and
25 with the poised that your bring to your testimony.

2 In fact, we really greatly appreciate that. Than
3 you.

4 KIVA AL RAHAWAN: Thank you.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: Thank you,
6 everybody.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And--and I'll add
8 that the--the way we change laws is we have to change
9 our lawmakers, and especially to all the women on
10 this panel, let's continue to raise our--our voices
11 and especially in our community as we keep alerting
12 them and supporting our women in our community to
13 raise or to rise in our ranks of leadership, and
14 that's how we change our lives, and that's how we get
15 back to those original moments in American history
16 when we were--we were a lot more open, and again, I'm
17 going to share with you some of these statistics from
18 the Safe Passage Project, and where you were, almost
19 200,000 refugees were being accepted. Where now
20 we're fighting for 10,000 at the end of September,
21 but we need you at the table in making decisions.
22 And so I just want to say thank you for being here
23 today. Our final panel [pause] Roxanna Bernali,
24 North--Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation;
25 Melissa Setu (sp?) Haitian Women for Haitian

2 Refugees; Matteo Avolutino (sp?); Javier Travino;
3 Rosita Calle, Progress and Accion. [pause,
4 background comments] Is there anybody else that
5 wanted to testify that has yet? Okay, can you make
6 sure you have a-- You--you have your sheet already?
7 Okay, and is--is Melissa Setu. (sp?).

8 MELISSA SETU: I'm right here.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Oh, you're here.
10 Did--did I say your name right.

11 MELISSA SETU: Setu.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Setu.

13 MELISSA SETU: Yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Setu. Almatto
15 Dilotino (sp?). Do we know if he's here. Javier
16 Trevino, Stevie Gnu (sp?) and Rosita Calle. Okay.
17 If you can begin. Thank you so much.

18 MELISSA SETU: First of all, I would like
19 to say thank you to the Chairman and Councilman both
20 for allowing me to testify. My name is Melissa and I
21 immigrated from Haiti and in Brooklyn. On January
22 12, 2010 a devastating earthquake shook Haiti killing
23 more 50,000 and leaving more 1.5 million people
24 displaced. Three days later, the Department of
25 Homeland Security announced that they would grant TPS

2 for Haitian Nationals who were presented in the U.S.
3 This affected me and those in my community including
4 myself and my family, and all of us to get work
5 authorization and to get jobs to support ourselves
6 and our families both here and in Haiti. I later
7 graduated from high school. I was valedictorian of
8 my class, and the Captain of the faculty and wasn't
9 sure how I could pay for college. My mother was in
10 ESL--was in an ESL class at Haitian Women for Haitian
11 Refugees. Haitian women for Haitian Refugees was
12 started in 1992 to respond to the human needs of
13 Haitian refugees, and immigrants in the U.S. through
14 persecution. Today, Haitian Women for Haitian
15 Refugees offer leadership and other organizing
16 training for adult literacy learning where we make
17 global connections to our local realities. They
18 produce and train about immigrant exploitation and
19 exclusion. At Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees I
20 learned that I could apply for GEO scholarship, which
21 is for TPS and youth strengthening through TPS. I
22 applied for the U.S. scholarship and I got it. I
23 have just completed my second year at CUNY college as
24 a nursing major, and today I work at Haitian Women
25 for Haitian Refugees where I am able to help other

2 immigrants in my community. And the year I am the
3 proud recipient of--of a scholarship at the UCLA June
4 Summer program. I support TPS for the people of
5 Ecuador, and I would like to say thank you for being
6 here.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank
8 you for your story, your story of courage and so much
9 perseverance. I--I have a couple of follow-up
10 questions, but we'll finish with our last piece of
11 testimony.

12 HERMINA YVALLA GUARELLA: My name is
13 Hermina Yvalla Guarella (sp?) I am a historian. I
14 live in New York for the past 17 years, and first of
15 all, I want to thank you our council members for this
16 important initiative. I'm here to--just to cover--
17 I'm part of the media, but as I am involved listening
18 to the testimonies, I think that it is my moral
19 obligation to participate to give you more elements
20 in order to consider to--to pass all the initiatives
21 for the--our countries, and basically I'm here to
22 give testimony because I am the founder of the Galo
23 Plaza International Committee. Galo Plaza--so
24 remember that this name is extremely important like
25 the Plaza Hotel. Galo Plaza was born in New York

2 City on February 17, 1906 from a former president of
3 Ecuador who serving as a diplomat. I think the
4 fourth diplomatic representation of Ecuador to the
5 United States. Galo Plaza was born at the Martin
6 Hotel on 8th Street and Fifth Avenue. So I invite you
7 to read the image in Spanish. It's packed full of
8 papers (sic) by the request of--by President Nelson
9 and Rockefeller, and today the New York City Council
10 Members, the Mayor Koch at that time. So as a part
11 of system, he was registered as an Ecuadorian because
12 the Barrons were not residents. They were diplomats,
13 but he was born in the city, and he was one of the
14 founders of the organization of United--the
15 organization of the United States and also founder
16 and secretary-general of the organization of American
17 states in Washington, D.C. Just this Saturday, the
18 past Saturday, June 25th, we remember when Galo Plaza
19 came to the city as the President of Ecuador. So I
20 invite you to read the beautiful plaque on the
21 sidewalk of Broadway and Water Street. We say June
22 25, 1951 Galo Plaza, Native New Yorker, President of
23 Ecuador. So as a historian I know the--the few and
24 deep links between Ecuador and New York. I also
25 invite you to--to look at the Metropolitan, the big

2 painting from Frederick Church is the most important
3 painting of the landscaping painter who traveled
4 specifically to Ecuador to paint the volcanoes. So
5 ask are these paintings six feet long, the height the
6 Andes. That is Ecuador. You don't know Ecuador.
7 Ecuador is a tiny country, a little more than 50
8 million. Council Member Menchaca, you can correct
9 me. I see that in the U.S. we had a Mexican
10 population of 30 million. So imagine this tiny
11 country with 50 million, but what I would like to
12 present to you is when you give to Ecuadorian
13 immigrants the opportunity to work and help because
14 they are not requesting fish. They are just
15 requesting the tools to get the fish. You are
16 helping a lot of countries because at this moment
17 Ecuador is the most international nation in South
18 America. You can find one million Columbian
19 immigrants. You can find immigrants from Peru from
20 Uruguay from Argentina. You can find immigrants from
21 all the countries. A lot of immigrants from Cuba. A
22 lot they have adopted from Cuba, and also that you
23 have people from India. You have people from all
24 over the planet in Ecuador because the national
25 currency also is dollars. So after the bankruptcy of

2 the financial system in Ecuador many, many, many
3 years ago, Ecuadorians moved to--to--to the U.S. but
4 basically New York is the--the place with the largest
5 Ecuadorian community. So New York has many, many
6 historic links wit Ecuador, but when you get the
7 opportunity to Ecuadorians to have the tools to help
8 the country, you are supporting and help people from
9 around the world. And remember the historic link
10 because nobody choose a place to work like Galo Plaza
11 who is a New York, but he was president of Ecuador,
12 close, close friend of Eleanor Roosevelt who was also
13 at the Galapagos Islands because of the World War.
14 Ecuador gave the Galapagos Islands as point to, you
15 know, after the Pearl Harbor attacks. So she was
16 there, and many, many personalities around the world
17 because we are just at the needle of the planet, and
18 we are so open. And I think it's a little
19 opportunity. I think we have to keep fighting for a
20 legal reform nationwide for everybody, but I thank
21 you for this initiative. It's very important, and
22 please give a citing for the Ecuadorians because more
23 than Ecuadorians, we are New Yorkers and we break
24 barriers. We believe in human beings and we are in

2 this planet less than 100 years. So I think it's a
3 very good opportunity to make this heard. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you so much,
5 and I can't thank you enough for--for that, and a
6 good way to end the conversation in a big way for us
7 to honor in the midst of this difficult moment where
8 we are advocating on behalf of both our Syrian
9 refugees and our Ecuadorian families both in Ecuador
10 and here in the United States in New York City that
11 we also celebrate our culture and our heritage and--
12 So thank you so much for--for the-the nugget of--of
13 beauty that we celebrate in solidarity with
14 Ecuadorian Diaspora and the work that they are doing
15 around the world that's specifically here in New York
16 City. And I'm going to end with-- Well, actually
17 going to have one--one quick question for Melissa.
18 And tell me a little bit about your TPS experience
19 because it's an important thing to--to talk about and
20 how TPS affects the lives of--of--of our--of our
21 young people and accessing education was something
22 that really changed and gave you those opportunities.
23 So--so just kind of talk to me a little bit about how
24 TPS really offered those opportunities and what they-

2 -what they were specifically that you couldn't get
3 without TPS?

4 MELISSA SETU: Yes, so when I was in high
5 school, I was like one of the top students, and
6 because of TPS, it allowed me to work after high
7 school, and I was able to support my family. I was
8 out of school for one month--I mean for one semester
9 because I wasn't able to get financial aid. But
10 because of GEO (sic) scholarships I was able to apply
11 and I got accepted to get the scholarships, and this
12 summer I got this opportunity to go to L.A. for
13 orientation for a June Summer--for June Summer
14 program and I was able to meet a lot of people who
15 also have TPS and DACA. But some were also
16 undocumented, but I also feel blessed because I was
17 given a lot of opportunities that a lot of people who
18 are undocumented couldn't have because most of them
19 are not able to work in places, and they get
20 discrimination from a lot of people as well.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And again, just
22 thank you so much for--for offering that--that--that
23 grim sort of just opportunity that we're--that's--
24 that's what we're talking about. And--and so just
25 finally in my kind of final--final words as we close

2 this hearing, I--I want to remember what's brining us
3 here today, and that's everything from political or
4 gang violence, unrest in countries, climate change.
5 Them and these things are--are alive and well right
6 now in our world, and they're affecting the entire
7 planet. And each and every day we make decisions
8 individually about what we can do to help our
9 neighbors. And that sentiment of help our neighbors
10 has to grow beyond the individual and--and, in fact,
11 our government and how our governments both the
12 local, state, federal and international governments
13 have that same kind of commitment to our neighbors,
14 and we're doing that. And this is a moral--this is a
15 moral opportunity for us to make an action and affirm
16 our values of family, and that's what we're trying to
17 do here. And that's what we will take on in the City
18 Council and soon vote out both of these resolutions
19 with high praise from this Council. And, when we do
20 this, we value the lives not just the ones in Sunset
21 Park, but the ones in Syria. Not the ones--not just
22 the ones in East Harlem, but in Ecuador, and we do
23 that together because we know that some of the--the--
24 the highest impacts are to our children, and to our
25 mothers or to our women. They're the ones that are

2 impacted the most by all these political and climate
3 changing and--and getting the violence that we're
4 experiencing in the world. And so we--we do that
5 together, and it makes us stronger. This isn't a
6 thing that we give without reci--reciprocity. We
7 know that when we--when we give our communities
8 opportunities we--we become stronger. We become
9 stronger in our culture. We become stronger in our
10 economy, and that's--that's beautiful because it's a-
11 -it's a full circle. We're bringing everybody
12 together, and everybody's benefitting from these
13 actions. This isn't us just spending money to spend
14 money. This is about us valuing our--our sense of
15 family, and our moral obligations to our neighbors,
16 and no neighbor should be walled outside of that
17 opportunity. Every neighbor deserves an opportunity
18 no matter where they are in the world, and that's
19 what we hold dear here in New York City. So thank
20 you so much for being our final speakers, and we are
21 going to officially close this hearing. I want to
22 thank Indiana Portia (sp?) here, who's our Counsel to
23 the Immigration Committee, and also all the Council
24 Committee staff. I want to thank my--my direct
25 district staff, Adriana Garcia, who's my legislative,

2 budget, everything in the City Council work that we
3 do here, and everyone else that was at home listening
4 to us today. Thank you so much, and this now
5 concludes the hearing. [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date July 12, 2016