

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

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November 17, 2016
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm,
14th Fl.

B E F O R E:

BEN KALLOS
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

David G. Greenfield
Mark Levine
Carlos Menchaca
Antonio Reynoso
Ritchie J. Torres
Joseph C. Borelli

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

Mindy Tarlow
Director
Mayor's Office of Operations

Nisha Agarwal
Commissioner
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

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TRANSCRIPTION NOTE: French spoken and translated beginning at timestamp 01:22:02 in document.

[background comments]

[sound check]

[pause]

[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Good afternoon and welcome to this hearing of the Committee on Governmental Operations. I'm Council Member Ben Kallos, Chair of the Committee. You can tweet me @BenKallos, B E N K A L L O S; also, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, and Pokemon GO [laughter] and if you disagree with something somebody is saying, you can use hand gestures such as this [two thumbs down], if you agree you can use hand gestures like this [two thumbs up] or also, [hands up, moving fingers] some folks refer to as twinkling.

Today we're holding an oversight hearing assessing New York City's language access services as well as a first hearing on Int. 1181-2016, sponsored by Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito and that I've also co-sponsored in relation to improving access to city services for limited English proficient individuals.

1
2 There's been a language services coordinator with the
3 Mayor's office ever since 1989's Charter revision and
4 the Council has passed many local laws on language
5 access in specific instances, but perhaps the most
6 important local steps on language access until now
7 were Local Law 73 of 2013 in relation to language
8 access for persons receiving assistance from health
9 and human services agencies and Executive Order 120,
10 which required all agencies providing public service
11 to develop agency-specific language access plans and
12 provide services in at least the top six limited
13 English proficient languages spoken in the city.

14 Int. 1181 would codify into law those
15 requirements of Executive Order 120, but it would
16 also require the use of language access surveys for
17 persons served by agencies and for individual
18 agencies to provide service in as many as six
19 additional languages based on their survey results.
20 Additionally, it would require an examination of
21 agency staffing levels with regard to providing
22 language access services and public postings of
23 language access information.

24 Language access is vital to our city and
25 to ensuring access of services for all New Yorkers,

2 but this is not an issue of importance only to some
3 individual groups, it's an issue that is important to
4 all of us collectively. When our neighbors are
5 unable to do important things like starting a
6 business or relatively minor things like reporting
7 potholes because of language barriers, it affects us
8 too. We all benefit when we can all communicate.

9 I want to thank the Director of the
10 Mayor's Office of Operations, Mindy Tarlow for
11 joining us a second time this week; we endeavor to
12 see if we can do back to back hearings with the
13 Mayor's Office of Operations; also, for including the
14 number of translations requested in the Mayor's
15 Management Report, which was something discussed on
16 Tuesday, and this is a natural follow-up and then
17 just also as a fellow fan of *The Crown*, as well as to
18 Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant
19 Affairs, Nisha Agarwal, thank you for being here
20 today and thank you for my New York City ID, on
21 Roosevelt Island, where I understand we had more
22 people sign up in a smaller period of time than
23 anywhere else, and I challenge all of my fellow
24 Council Members to have just as many people sign up

2 for New York City ID at pop-ups in their districts,
3 and so the gauntlet has been thrown.

4 I also wanna thank The Speaker for
5 sponsoring this legislation and being such a strong
6 advocate on language access issues, as well as my
7 colleagues on the Committee -- Council Member Joe
8 Borelli, who maintains a perfect attendance, like his
9 predecessor, and it's good to have you in the perfect
10 attendance club. Finally, I would like to thank my
11 Committee Counsel, Brad Reid, Finance Analyst James
12 Subudhi, for both of them doing their job plus that
13 of Committee Analyst, as well as my Legislative
14 Director Paul Westrick for all of their hard work.

15 I look forward to our discussion today
16 with both the Administration and many advocates who
17 have joined us on how together we can advance
18 language access in the city. This is being live-
19 streamed online; you can go to legistar.nyc.gov and
20 please feel free to share the live stream so that
21 your friends watching online, on television or later
22 at home can see. If you haven't already signed up to
23 testify, please make sure to fill out one of these
24 slips; we will be swearing the Administration in, as
25 is our practice, and if you're a member of the

2 public, you'll have about two minutes for your
3 testimony; please make sure you have written
4 testimony. If you don't have written testimony,
5 that's still okay, if you can share your notes with
6 us after the hearing; that would be tremendous.

7 I'd now like to call the Director of the
8 Mayor's Office of Operations, Mindy Tarlow, as well
9 as Commissioner Nisha Agarwal.

10 [pause]

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Would you please
12 raise your right hand? Do you affirm to tell the
13 truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth in
14 your testimony before this committee and to respond
15 honestly to council member questions? [background
16 comment] Thank you.

17 [pause]

18 MINDY TARLOW: Good morning Chair Kallos,
19 member of the Committee, colleagues in government;
20 members of the public. My name is Mindy Tarlow; I'm
21 the Director of the Mayor's Office of Operations.

22 I wanna thank Speaker Mark-Viverito for
23 Int. 1181 and the Council's commitment to improving
24 access to city services for limited English
25 proficient individuals. In this time of uncertainty

1 and fear in immigrant communities, it's more
2 important than ever to ensure that the City is
3 accessible and welcoming in the languages spoken by
4 all of our residents; therefore, it's a pleasure to
5 be able to submit this testimony here today.

6
7 The Mayor's Office of Operations is
8 responsible for citywide performance management and
9 project implementation, working cooperatively with
10 individual agencies as well as coordinating
11 multiagency efforts. In addition to our general
12 mandate, our office has long been involved in the
13 provision of language access programs and cares
14 deeply about these services as a mechanism for
15 successfully integrating immigrant New Yorkers into
16 the city's civic, economic and cultural life.

17 In 2008, Executive Order 120 tasked
18 Operations, in collaboration with the Mayor's Office
19 of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA), with providing technical
20 assistance to any City agency providing direct public
21 services in drafting and implementing a language
22 access plan. We worked collaboratively with MOIA to
23 develop the content and format of each language
24 access plan as well as the corresponding language
25 access self-assessment survey.

2 As our partnership with MOIA has evolved
3 in recent years and as it's been led by the highly
4 competent Commissioner Agarwal, MOIA has taken on a
5 more significant oversight role of the City's
6 language access program and these initiatives are
7 currently housed within their office. Our
8 partnership with MOIA, however, remains very strong
9 on many aspects of language access. For example, in
10 2015 we co-presented plain language training to
11 agency language access liaisons and coordinators as
12 part of an overall training series hosted by MOIA.

13 Other past language access work by
14 Operations includes the creation of a language access
15 resource page on the City's employee portal that
16 aggregates links to training, signage and other
17 relevant resources. We also developed a volunteer
18 language bank that provides free translation services
19 from volunteer City employees, as well as the NYC
20 certified program to test the volunteers' language
21 proficiency and provide official language proficiency
22 certification.

23 Operations also shaped the language
24 gateway, which gives access to NYC.gov in languages
25 other than English and 311 developed a language

1
2 access complaint form. We continue to track
3 submissions of 311 complaints related to language
4 access and we are on-call as a potential member of
5 New York City Emergency Management's Emergency
6 Response Team as a part of their language access
7 protocol.

8 Today, Operations runs the Language
9 Access Secret Shopper program (LASS) in consultation
10 with MOIA. As part of the program, interns, called
11 "secret Shoppers," visit 150 to 200 walk-in service
12 centers throughout the five boroughs pretending that
13 they do not speak English. Secret Shoppers ask for
14 information about the services offered, observe and
15 rate interactions with frontline staff and security,
16 determine the amount and quality of translated
17 signage and documents and assess the quality in
18 interpretation, all while staying in character.

19 Operations and MOIA then meet with agency
20 managers to report on their findings and where
21 necessary, agencies take corrective actions. Last
22 findings not only helped the City identify areas for
23 improvement, but also highlight and recognize
24 exceptional customer service by City employees.

1
2 I'll now turn it over to my colleague,
3 Commissioner Nisha Agarwal, to speak to MOIA's
4 present role in the City's language access work.
5 Thank you.

6 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: Thank you Mindy
7 and thank you to Speaker Mark-Viverito, Chairman
8 Kallos and the distinguished committee members for
9 this opportunity to speak about language access.

10 As a public interest lawyer before my
11 appointment as Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of
12 Immigrant Affairs, I advocated for better language
13 access to immigrant New Yorkers and so I'm proud to
14 be able to continue that work at the Mayor's office.

15 MOIA's mandate is to promote the
16 wellbeing of immigrant communities; 60% of New
17 Yorkers are immigrants or the children of immigrants;
18 we want all New Yorkers to be fully engaged in the
19 conversation that is New York City.

20 Toward that end, one of MOIA's goals is
21 to promote immigrant inclusion within City government
22 to ensure that the City's operations, our policies,
23 programs, hiring practices, and communications and
24 outreach strategies account for and are responsive to
25 the needs of immigrants; language access is one key

1 aspect of immigrant inclusion. We know that
2 immigrants are anxious and fearful about some of the
3 proposals we've heard at the federal level; as the
4 Mayor has said, it is incumbent on the City that we
5 do everything we can to protect our immigrant
6 residents, and one of the most immediate and tangible
7 is to make sure everyone gets information about how
8 to access necessary city services.

9
10 In this testimony I will address the
11 City's efforts to serve limited English proficient or
12 LEP New Yorkers; clear and timely communication's
13 essential to effective government; we support the
14 goals of Int. 1181 to address language barriers and
15 look forward to discussing a legislation that serves
16 the needs of New Yorkers in the City.

17 First, a multilingual city requires a
18 multilingual government. Like its communities, the
19 City's language landscape is diverse and dynamic; New
20 Yorkers speak more than 200 languages; the
21 backgrounds, education and literacy of immigrant New
22 Yorkers vary widely. About 46% of New Yorkers speak
23 a language other than English at home; some of whom
24 speak multiple languages. Nearly a quarter of New
25 Yorkers are considered LEP, which means they do not

2 speak English as their primary language and have a
3 limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand
4 English.

5 LEP New Yorkers must navigate the City
6 system for a variety of reasons, such as to register
7 for services, manage small businesses or perhaps
8 secure social assistance or emergency services;
9 language assistance makes this possible.

10 Similarly, frontline staff at City
11 agencies serves multilingual LEP New Yorkers on a
12 daily basis; in order to fulfill their respected
13 missions, agency staff needs the tools and support to
14 engage proactively with diverse populations. I'll
15 just say maybe a little bit about the history of
16 language access in New York City.

17 Under the leadership of the City Council
18 and the de Blasio Administration, New York City has
19 been a national leader in ensuring that limited
20 English proficiency is not a barrier for residents.
21 MOIA has been involved with improving language access
22 since its establishment in the City Charter in 2003,
23 working with our sister agencies to implement a
24 series of language access laws. And you mentioned
25 some of these -- Local Law 73 of 2003, which

2 strengthened language access services for LEP New
3 Yorkers seeking social services; Local Law 55, which
4 addressed language barriers at pharmacies; Local Law
5 132 of 2013, which improved language access for LEP
6 business owners, and Local Law 25, which passed in
7 2016, which requires that City agency websites have a
8 translate button; and Executive Order 120, which was
9 signed by Mayor Bloomberg in 2008, which created a
10 citywide language access policy to ensure meaningful
11 access for LEP New Yorkers to city services.

12 MOIA plays an important role with
13 Operations in improving the accessibility of city
14 services for limited English speakers. MOIA provides
15 language access technical assistance to City
16 agencies; we share best practices and coordinate
17 agencies to accelerate this progress across the city;
18 we expanded the body of multilingual materials that
19 is clear and audience appropriate; and we help LEP
20 New Yorkers find services and information both in
21 person and online.

22 At the beginning of the de Blasio
23 Administration, MOIA found that many agencies had
24 made great strides in serving the LEP public, but
25 there was more work to be done to support and broaden

1 language access across City agencies. Last year,
2 with the support of the Mayor, MOIA launched its
3 Language Access Initiative to strengthen language
4 access on a citywide level. As part of this
5 initiative, the Administration asked that all City
6 agencies appoint a senior level Language Access
7 Coordinator who had the authority within the agency
8 to work with agency partners to advance language
9 access goals; also, to create language access
10 cabinets within their agency, to support
11 implementation across a number of different agency
12 work areas and ensure that appropriate language
13 service contracts are in place; and finally to update
14 their language access plan.
15

16 MOIA hosted a series of trainings for
17 agency staff about language access policies and
18 resources; these sessions addressed an array of
19 topics, including bilingual staff, data collection,
20 plain language, and emergency preparedness; they were
21 also an opportunity for agencies to share best
22 practices on language access.

23 MOIA continues to oversee annual language
24 access assessments, provide one-on-one technical
25 assistance to agencies, and explore ways to integrate

1
2 LEP communications into the standard operating
3 procedures of City agencies.

4 To increase agency accountability, MOIA
5 worked with Operations to establish and provide
6 signage for a 311 language access complaint process
7 that allows New Yorkers to file complaints around
8 language access by calling 311. MOIA also meets
9 periodically with advocates to hear language access
10 concerns and support the language access secret
11 shopper program, which was mentioned by Director
12 Tarlow.

13 In addition, MOIA works to build tools to
14 enhance the City's communication with LEP New
15 Yorkers; we manage a volunteer bank that includes
16 over 1,300 bilingual City employees and we created a
17 pilot program for community interpreters. We assist
18 with providing interpretation services at mayoral
19 events; MOIA also certified and trained 125 community
20 volunteers to serve as interpreters, and I think some
21 of them are in the audience today.

22 MOIA is currently working with professors
23 and students from the Strategic Management Program at
24 Parsons to understand better the frontline
25 interaction between LEP customers and City staff in

1 order to develop solutions, and earlier this year
2 MOIA launched an ethnic and community media directory
3 to expand the City's use of community and ethnic
4 media, often a key resource for LEP communities.
5

6 As MOIA continues to work with City
7 agencies to build capacity and integrate multilingual
8 communications into day-to-day operations, we have
9 observed solid progress citywide. One indicator is
10 agency spending on contracted language services.

11 Across City agencies expenditures on language
12 services have grown significantly since the beginning
13 of the de Blasio Administration, increasing from
14 \$13.8 million in Fiscal Year 2014 to \$18.5 million in
15 Fiscal 2015, to approximately \$21.2 million during
16 the past fiscal year; this includes the DCAS citywide
17 contracts as well as NYPD, Health and Hospitals and
18 the Department of Education.

19 Similarly, expenditures on ethnic and
20 multilingual media have risen as well, from just over
21 \$1 million in Fiscal 2014 to \$2.4 million in Fiscal
22 2016. The percentage of ethnic and community media
23 as the percentage of overall ad buys increased during
24 this time period, from 15% to 22.5%. Multilingual ad
25 campaigns like those for Paid Sick Leave and IDNYC

1
2 are becoming more frequent. New Yorkers can
3 increasingly find City information in publications
4 like *El Diario*, *Bangla Patrika* and *Sink Hasio*
5 **[inaudible]** [sp?].

6 In the meantime, individual agencies have
7 also taken significant steps to advance language
8 access.

9 For example, the Department of Education
10 expanded its commitment to language access by adding
11 borough-level field language access coordinators to
12 oversee improvement across the system; they're
13 currently training the roughly 1,700 school-based
14 language access coordinators on policy tools.
15 Additionally, expanded direct access to telephonic
16 interpretation for the school-based LACs will enable
17 LEP parents to participate formally and fully in
18 their children's education.

19 Emergency Management provides its Ready
20 New York materials in 13 languages to expand
21 preparedness across all neighborhoods and if citywide
22 emergency, there is a language access lead team and
23 task force focused on the communication needs of LEP
24 New Yorkers.

2 The City Commission on Human Rights has
3 embraced language access and significantly expanded
4 its capacity to work with and protect the rights of
5 LEP New Yorkers; it has added staff to its Law
6 Enforcement Bureau, who speak seven languages and has
7 translated recent agency materials into nine
8 languages.

9 Also, Small Business First (SB1), an
10 initiative led by Small Business Services and the
11 Mayor's Office of Operations ensures that regulatory
12 agency inspectors who engage with business owners can
13 use interpretation services to speak with LEP
14 individuals at their establishment. Agencies
15 involved in Small Business First have also created
16 multilingual information materials so business owners
17 have the information they need to comply with the
18 laws.

19 The Human Resource Administration
20 translated content on its website into six languages
21 and launched a multilingual website to raise
22 awareness about SNAP; it regularly engages advocates
23 to hear about and address language access concerns
24 and has an immigrant resources page on its website
25

1 containing information about eligibility for various
2 benefits and entitlement programs.

3
4 The City also created New York City Well
5 website, which is available in 2,000 languages and
6 connects New Yorkers to confidential mental health
7 support, which is particularly needed for many at
8 this time.

9 This administration will continue to
10 advance language access to improve equity across New
11 York City; the de Blasio Administration believes that
12 the City must speak the languages of the New Yorkers
13 we serve. Just as IDNYC, New York's municipal ID
14 program, helps all New Yorkers to participate more
15 fully in civil society, improving language access is
16 a critical way to assist more New Yorkers to thrive
17 within the city. And just like IDNYC is being
18 replicated across the country, we want New York City
19 to be a model for other municipalities as they
20 address similar language access challenges.

21 MOIA supports codifying the substance and
22 policies behind EO 120 and the City Charter to help
23 give these language access efforts a lasting effect.
24 We thank the Speaker for introducing Int. 1181 and I
25 look forward to working with the Council on this

1
2 legislation as we continue to build a city that
3 serves its diverse and multilingual communities in an
4 equitable and just manner. Thank you very much.

5 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you. We've
6 been joined by Council Member David Greenfield.

7 So it seems like there's a strong
8 partnership in the Mayor's office; are you able to
9 provide specific division of roles and
10 responsibilities for each part of the program so that
11 when or if different pieces are working or not
12 working we know who is ultimately responsible?

13 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: Sure, so I can
14 start with that. I think the role that MOIA has been
15 playing has really been on a policy level on language
16 access, being able to provide the technical
17 assistance to agencies and really work closely with
18 them and to manage some aspects of the program; like
19 I mentioned, the volunteer, both the employees and
20 the community volunteers, and really being able to
21 kind of lead in those efforts, and we've really loved
22 our partnership with Operations; they lead the effort
23 on the secret shopper program and on supporting us in
24 many ways in the operation of our language access
25 initiative.

1
2 MINDY TARLOW: Yes, I would echo what
3 Commissioner Agarwal said and I would also just put
4 it into the context of how Operations works with all
5 agencies, particularly around multiagency
6 initiatives; in this case we have a specific role
7 around language access, but our partnership with MOIA
8 is like our partnership with a lot of agencies in
9 general. Also, as I tried to point out in my
10 testimony, some of the things as they were created
11 were created or incubated within the Office of
12 Operations and that also happens with various other
13 projects that the City puts together and then kind of
14 spins off, if you will, into the operating or
15 policymaking agency. So I think we have a lot of
16 role in standing up a number of the initiatives and
17 continue to work cooperatively with MOIA, but the
18 programs are largely housed in that agency at the
19 time.

20 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: There is just so
21 very much information in the Mayor's Management
22 Report and as referenced in my opening, this year,
23 following advice from *The Crown*, we flipped it over
24 and looked at all the schedules and in there we have
25 a request for interpretations that's being tracked

1
2 and in FY16 we had almost a million requests for
3 interpretation at HRA, we had more than half a
4 million requests for interpretation at 311 and
5 238,000, almost a quarter million with NYPD, where
6 perhaps people may be in the most -- where it may be
7 crucial for there to be understanding, given some of
8 the issues we've seen where instructions being given
9 by NYPD might not have been understood by the folks
10 receiving the instructions.

11 Other than the total number of requests
12 for each agency; I know we've spoke about it at a
13 previous hearing, but putting it into this context,
14 what are you tracking other than the total number of
15 requests for each agency and how can we use that to
16 better inform the delivery of our services and
17 language access?

18 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: So it's a question
19 about data that we're tracking, yeah [sic], just the
20 request for language access; can City agencies...

21 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Right, so ultimately
22 we've got this schedule; hopefully there's data
23 behind it; what types of data is already being
24 collected so that we can refer to... that we don't

1
2 necessarily have to reinvest the wheel, we can work
3 from what we have?

4 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: Sure. So I can
5 start with that. One of the important things we've
6 been tracking, in which I mentioned in my testimony,
7 is also just expenditures on language access, which
8 gives us a sense of where the investments are going
9 to support New Yorkers and so we've seen within this
10 administration a consistent increase in that, which I
11 think is reflective of removing the barriers and
12 having greater agency engagement on those matters.
13 Also, some agencies will actually track the primary
14 language or the preferred language for New Yorkers.
15 In IDNYC, for example, New Yorkers can opt to have
16 their preferred language listed on the card itself,
17 so some of those kind of data are also very useful to
18 get a sense of... you know both, sort of communicating
19 to the community that we are meant to serve New
20 Yorkers in their language, but also being able to
21 provide data about the language preferences of New
22 Yorkers and what the sort of top language preferences
23 are, and finally, I think an important resource has
24 really been the Department of City Planning for us to
25 understand data from the census about New Yorkers,

1 about how our language diversity is changing and
2 evolving over time so that we can then assist
3 agencies and figuring out what translations they need
4 to provide, what strategies they need employ to best
5 serve the communities that they are working with.

7 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: The Department of
8 City Planning uses census and American Community
9 Survey data to determine the most commonly spoken
10 non-English languages; how accurate do you believe
11 that data is in identifying the most needed languages
12 in this city?

13 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: So we find that
14 the census data, but in particular, the work that the
15 Department of City Planning does to be able to sort
16 of support us year to year, not just at sort of 10-
17 year marks of the major census data, is very useful
18 in being able to determine across the city what the
19 languages may be, what the sort of emerging languages
20 may be in different communities and helping to sort
21 of map what the needs may be. Again, to use IDNYC as
22 an example in thinking about the languages we needed
23 even just for our outreach staff and what kind of
24 bilingual abilities they needed, we were able to work
25 with the Department of City Planning and the census

1 data that they rely on to be able to make strategic
2 choices from the outset about our program and about
3 what languages we needed to provide.
4

5 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: And so what, the
6 census data only captures one non-English language;
7 is there a concern that this data may end up
8 marginalizing groups, such as the African diaspora
9 that speak a regional dialect at home but can also
10 speak a more common language such as French or Arabic
11 that is not reflected in the data?

12 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: So we do think
13 it's very important for us, especially as we're
14 thinking about this legislation, to be cognizant of
15 and capturing some of this lingua franca, if you
16 will, that's often shared across communities that may
17 speak a range of different dialects and we've
18 actually been working with community members on
19 exactly that in ensuring French translations were
20 needed to be able to address concerns from the
21 African diaspora are very open to feedback from the
22 community about ways in which those language needs
23 maybe are not coming up through the data, but do come
24 to us from the community often.
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: And do you think,
3 just in terms of the schedule and tracking of
4 requests for interpretation, are we seeing that folks
5 are asking for interpretation in a more common
6 language that they may not be as fluent in versus a
7 dialect that might be more fluent and accessible for
8 them?

9 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: So that's sort of
10 coming to us less through the data and more from
11 feedback from the community about the sort of
12 language needs that may be particularly prevalent in
13 certain communities. For example, Nepali may not be
14 the top language citywide, but may be very important
15 in certain neighborhoods and so that's the kind of
16 feedback that we are also hearing from the community
17 and trying to address as needed based on programs
18 that are especially oriented towards serving those
19 communities.

20 MINDY TARLOW: And if I might just add,
21 just consistent with our previous testimony earlier
22 in the wee, we are trying to get some backup data for
23 the interpretation requests -- what the language
24 requested is and what the source of interpretation
25 is, whether it's Language Line or whether it's a live

2 interpreter. So we will be circling back to you to
3 the extent that we can make that information
4 available.

5 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: That leads right
6 into my next question, which is; how many different
7 language service vendors is the City contracting
8 with; what kinds of services are they providing; what
9 is the cost; are we paying per translation or is it a
10 buffet style of all we can eat and how do we do the
11 procurement agency by agency; and are there services
12 that perhaps the Council could tap into or are we on
13 our own?

14 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: That's a great
15 question. I'm afraid I don't have all of the
16 specific details, but we know, for example, the
17 Department of Citywide Administrative Services
18 manages a very large contract across City agencies,
19 and so that's an agency we work with very closely,
20 both to manage the contract itself and to ensure that
21 if there's problems with the quality of some of the
22 providers that we can kind of intervene in that
23 respect, and I think partnership with the Council to
24 ensure that you all are able to tap into those

1
2 resources as well is something we'd be happy to talk
3 about.

4 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: So actually, on that
5 note, we did try to do a language accessible hearing
6 in Governmental Operations and one of the issues that
7 we quickly ran into is that the translator we had
8 wasn't able to translate some of the more technical
9 language that we were using in the Council into the
10 language that we were focusing on at that, which was
11 whether or not we should have more Russian
12 interpreters at poll sites; we have a resolution on
13 that, which I hope to pass soon as possible. But how
14 do we rank vendors, how do we make sure vendors have
15 translators who can deal with complex language and
16 translate?

17 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: Yeah, it's a great
18 question. So I think there's a few steps there; I
19 think one is to just be able to kind of hear about
20 the challenges with particular vendors allows us, as
21 MOIA, to be able to intervene kind of one on one with
22 those providers and raise the concerns. I think the
23 other is around best practices in working with
24 interpreters and translators; I think particularly
25 for more complicated areas it's important that the

1 interpreter be briefed beforehand, but also to get
2 interpreters that are trained in those areas -- in
3 the medical context, for example, you have
4 interpreters who have to learn the medical vocabulary
5 alongside the sort of language itself, so that's an
6 area that we're sort of looking at and happy to work
7 with you on particularly for some of these hearings.
8 Another piece that we did, and I know that the
9 Council has done this occasionally for hearings as
10 well, is we acquired a set of headsets to be able to
11 do simultaneous interpretation for community members
12 that we use in the mayoral town halls, and so then
13 that we there's more engagement with the community.
14 Those town halls tend to be more focused on community
15 concerns; may not have the sort of complexities in
16 medical language, for example, as there would be in a
17 health care context, but I think working to smooth
18 that over with particular vendors and make sure that
19 the vendors are prepared for what they're walking
20 into I think is very important.

22 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Are there any
23 languages outside of the current top six that you
24 believe are of significant importance either to the
25

1 public or the City and should be included regardless
2 of their current ranking?

3
4 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: So we would love
5 to talk about what some of the languages are that
6 have really emerged for us in our as being among the
7 top; I think we've mentioned and discussed French
8 previously; there are sort of other languages. Much
9 will also depend on the agencies and the sort of
10 communities that they're serving and so we also want
11 to ensure that agencies have the flexibility to be
12 able to provide the translations that are needed for
13 the communities that they serve. What I will say in
14 our experience in the last couple of years is that
15 agencies are often willing to go beyond the top six,
16 so I think in the Paid Sick Leave Campaign they
17 translated the applications and the materials into 25
18 languages; we did the same for IDNYC, so I think
19 there's an openness to the translations and to
20 thinking through language access very broadly.

21 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: We've been joined by
22 Council Member Mark Levine. How does the City
23 address language access in neighborhoods where
24 there's a heavy concentration of one language that is
25 not spoken as much elsewhere in the city?

1
2 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: So I think this is
3 something that we are trying to figure out and sort
4 of be able to advise our agency partners on being
5 able to do that, so this is where I think the
6 flexibility and thinking about new legislation will
7 be important to give agencies, for example, Small
8 Business Services may be providing trainings and
9 information to small business owners and may need
10 some languages and provide support in some languages
11 that are not among the top languages citywide. So I
12 think allowing them to be able to have that
13 flexibility to provide those kinds of services I
14 think is very important and something we're in
15 conversation with now, but will be an important part
16 of the discussion I think **[inaudible]**.

17 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: And I think, going
18 back to a theme; is there a common resource, so -- we
19 have a large number of agencies, each with their own
20 fixed budget and so if an agency wishes to have
21 translation at a public event or to translate
22 materials, is that able to be done off budget or
23 interagency budget so that there is no penalty to an
24 agency's budget for trying to go above and beyond and
25 actually do what's right and having a pool of money

1
2 or resources at the Mayor's office to provide that as
3 a service to all the City agencies and perhaps even
4 the Council?

5 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: So we have --
6 most, if not all of the agencies, have language
7 access budgets; this is something that they are
8 legally obligated to do and I think are committed to
9 doing and have shown an interest in sort of providing
10 those services. I will say this, as a sort of common
11 resource agencies have, interpretation resources,
12 which are available in virtually any language that
13 New Yorkers speak and so the question can often come
14 up about translation, and I think what we've seen is
15 that agencies are willing, from their own budgets, to
16 be able to provide those greater translations. MOIA
17 has been working across the Mayor's office to
18 essentially serve as the language access coordinator
19 for Mayor's office agencies themselves, and to
20 establish a contract for our own Mayor's office
21 agencies and be able to do that which did not
22 previously exist and so that's a role that we plan to
23 continue playing and as I mentioned before, sort of
24 happy to continue **[inaudible]** partnerships with the
25 Council.

2 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: To Council Member
3 Mark Levine for questions.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Thank you Chair
5 Kallos. Great to see you. What percent of New
6 Yorkers are dominant in a non-English language?

7 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: About half of New
8 Yorkers speak another language than English at home
9 and a quarter is limited English proficient.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVIN: And a quarter...

11 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: Are limited
12 English proficient.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Fair enough. So
14 of that quarter, what portions speak one of the top
15 six languages that we've identified?

16 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: That's a great
17 question and it is I think approximately 80% that
18 speaks sort of among the top languages, but I will
19 have to double check that math for you though.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: But just playing
21 that out, so that would mean that roughly 400,000 or
22 500,000 people, if I'm doing the math right, are non-
23 English proficient, but do not speak one of the main
24 six languages; right? So while as a percent of the
25 total city, then it would be 5% of the population;

1 absolute numbers are quite significant. These six
2 languages have been identified and selected as part
3 of each agency's language access plan; correct?

4 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: Correct and it's
5 part of the Executive Order 120.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: And the Executive
7 Order sets a floor, but agencies, at their
8 discretion, can go beyond that?

9 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: Correct.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Every agency
11 currently has a language access plan in place?

12 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: Yes.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: How often are
14 those plans updated?

15 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: Annually, I
16 believe. [background comments] Reports are issued
17 annually.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Right, but such a
19 strategic question, such as how far to go beyond the
20 basic six, [background comment] is the type of thing
21 you might revisit every time you updated the plan?

22 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: Yes, absolutely.
23 And I will also say it's something that we do on
24 an ongoing basis with agencies as they're thinking
25

1 through whatever initiatives they may be working on.

2 So recently, for example, Department of Health and
3 Mental Hygiene reached out to us and wanted advice on
4 training for language access, so we'll sort of pitch
5 in real time as well to work with agencies on these
6 questions.
7

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Understood. But
9 it could be that an agency could go years and years
10 without actually revisiting the question of what
11 languages beyond the basic six they wanna cover; is
12 that right?

13 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: To some extent
14 it's our job as MOIA to help encourage that
15 rethinking.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Right, but just
17 understand, so if the legislation requires an annual
18 report, [background comment] but there's no
19 legislative mandate to reconsider the language access
20 plan. I understand that they get...

21 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: Right.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: helpful
23 encouragement from you.

24 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: Right.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: What are the
3 fastest growing languages in New York currently?

4 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: That's a great
5 question. The top languages are Spanish and Chinese
6 and then I think that some of the emerging, growing
7 languages include French, Arabic -- I think those are
8 the two that have kind of come up most frequently for
9 us in our discussions.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: For sure, but
11 what are the fastest growing outside of the core six?

12 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: Outside of the
13 core. So I don't believe that Arabic is in that, but
14 we can get back in a second on that. Yeah...

15 [crosstalk]

16 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Okay, I thought
17 it was. Alright. Maybe it should be. As you
18 probably gathered from this whole line of
19 questioning, this is a very dynamic environment, as
20 immigration patterns change, which they constantly do
21 in the city, there are language groups which are
22 surging, and some of them might be receding, and it's
23 probably difficult to track with a kind of data-
24 driven certainty; I think it's important that we
25 figure out how to [background comment] so that we're

2 not caught and flatfooted [background comment] as
3 languages which might previously had seen to be
4 obscure into the mainstream. You know, I don't know
5 how many Wolof speakers there are today, but I know
6 it's growing [background comment] and it may one day
7 surpass the number of speakers of Korean. [background
8 comment] Do you have an update relative to that...?
9 [crosstalk]

10 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: I have an update...

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Okay.

12 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: Of emerging
13 languages, in addition to Arabic, which is not in the
14 top languages currently, Urdu-Bengali and various
15 African dialects, as you mentioned, are growing
16 rapidly.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: I believe that
18 and it's something that I'd like to see us do more to
19 serve, when you consider the absolute numbers are in
20 the hundreds of thousands, so I would encourage your
21 office and the agencies that you're liaising with to
22 be aggressive in expanding their reach to emerging
23 languages in real time and that we figure out as a
24 city a way to understand those trends so that we

1 don't unintentionally leave thousands of new arrivals
2 and other important New Yorkers behind.

3
4 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: Absolutely.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Thank you and
6 thank you, Mr. Chair.

7 [pause]

8 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: And Council Member
9 Levine, in my district we've hosted an IDNYC pop-up;
10 we had over 400 sign-ups in just under about four-
11 and-a-half days, so I hereby challenge you to having
12 a pop-up in your district where you sign up more. Do
13 you accept that challenge?

14 [background comment]

15 [laughter]

16 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: 'Kay.

17 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: This is amazing.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: I can promise you
19 that.

20 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: And I guess one
21 question around it; I got this IDNYC in my district
22 at a pop-up and so there's a lot of cultural
23 benefits, a lot of benefits on that, whether it's
24 cultural institutions, credit unions being able to
25 actually start banking for a portion of the

1 population that is unbanked, which is not a good
2 thing -- it's hard to save when you have nowhere to
3 save -- health, fitness, sporting, libraries, items
4 like that. Is there any plan in terms of making sure
5 that we provide accessibility to cultural
6 institutions, both big and small and libraries and
7 whatnot where they might not currently have the
8 budget but might need to serve a community that is in
9 the top six or even beyond?

11 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: In terms of
12 language access at those institutions...? [crosstalk]

13 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: That's correct.

14 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: So we partner
15 closely with all of those institutions; we don't
16 advise on the language access in particular, but I do
17 think we can be a resource for those agencies, the
18 institutions, as they're thinking about language
19 access. I know that many of the large cultural
20 institutions, for example, actually do a very good
21 job in providing interpretation services; I think
22 largely 'cause they're thinking about serving
23 tourists [sic], but I think if we reorient and look
24 at the global city that we are, there's an important
25 need to do that just for New Yorkers.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Do you have any
3 statements in closing?

4 COMMISSIONER AGARWAL: No, except for
5 support of the legislation and look forward to
6 working with you on it.

7 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Our pleasure. Thank
8 you; we'll excuse our first panel. Our next panel
9 will include Tiffany Wheatland from New York
10 Immigration Coalition; Lawrence, and your last name
11 starts with I believe a B or an R, from African
12 Communities Together; we also have Omar, whose last
13 name starts with a K, if you want to join your
14 colleague; Cecilia, last name starts with a G, from
15 the Violence Intervention Program; and Donna, last
16 name starts with a C, from Asian Americans for
17 Equity. If you can go up to the table where folks
18 were giving testimony. [pause] And so we'll give
19 you about two minutes; your testimony will be online;
20 it'll be in the record, so if your testimony is under
21 two minutes, feel free to read your testimony, if
22 not, please give us the highlights and excerpts.
23 Also, if you want your testimony to be computer
24 readable and searchable by Google, you can email us,
25 our committee counsel -- you can just email me,

1
2 BKallos@council.nyc.gov and we'll put it up in a
3 computer readable format, so send it to us as a Word
4 document, in open document format, you name it, and
5 we'll try to make sure that Google sees where you are
6 on this position. And whoever wishes to go first,
7 please do so.

8 [background comment]

9 CECILIA GASTON: Good morning or
10 afternoon. My name is Cecilia Gaston and I wanna
11 thank you very much for inviting me to testify here.
12 Thank you, Committee Chair, Council Member Kallos and
13 all the City Council members that have had an
14 interest in language access.

15 My name is Cecilia Gaston and I'm the
16 Executive Director of the Violence Intervention
17 Program and I'm here today as the organization
18 plaintiff in a case against the NYPD for failing to
19 provide language access to limited English speaking
20 victims.

21 The Violence Intervention Program is a
22 nationally recognized Latino organization dedicated
23 to ending violence against the lives of women. VIP
24 delivers a full range of culturally competent
25 services that enable victims to become free of

1 violence in the city and achieve their full
2 potential. We are the only Latino organization
3 serving women across the whole city.
4

5 Well over half of our clients have
6 limited English proficiency and are directly impacted
7 by the City's language access policies. What is
8 spelled out in this document is a well-intentioned
9 plan that among other things stipulates City agencies
10 should train their staff on language access policy
11 and procedures and that said policies and procedures
12 should incorporate information gathered from the
13 population in language access surveys, but this plan
14 can only be effective insomuch as it can be enforced
15 and quite frankly, it has no teeth.

16 Domestic violence victims trying to build
17 their lives need timely and meaningful access to
18 various City agencies and this plan just simply does
19 not do enough to ensure that the right of limited
20 English speaking proficiency individuals to
21 communicate effectively is protected. It is
22 precisely due to the plan's unenforceability that our
23 clients are met time and time again with unqualified
24 interpreters [bell]. Can I just finish?
25

1
2 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Sure, please wrap
3 up.

4 CECILIA GASTON: Thank you. Just because
5 someone is raised in speaking Spanish with their
6 grandmother, for example, does not make them
7 qualified providers of competent Spanish language
8 interpretation. Language interpretation includes not
9 just translation but capturing comparable meaning
10 from one language to another. Needless to say, there
11 is a huge difference between being a speaker of
12 another language and being a trained interpreter of
13 that language and that distinction needs to be
14 respected and qualified into New York City law that
15 can be enforced. Victims need language access, at its
16 purest sense [sic], and a way to hold the City
17 agencies accountable that do not comply. In short,
18 having a language access plan does not guarantee
19 having qualified interpretation in all City agencies.
20 Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you.

22 TIFFANY WHEATLAND: Good afternoon.

23 Chair Kallos and members of the Council, thank you so
24 much for convening this hearing.

1
2 I want to also take a moment just to
3 thank Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito for her continued
4 leadership on behalf of the immigrant communities.

5 My name is Tiffany Wheatland and I'm
6 Community Outreach Manager at the New York
7 Immigration Coalition. We are an umbrella policy and
8 advocacy organization of nearly 200 member
9 organizations across New York State. We aim to
10 achieve a fair and more just society that values the
11 contributions of immigrants and extends opportunities
12 to all.

13 In February 2016, in her annual State of
14 the City Address, Speaker Mark-Viverito stated the
15 need for justice in our immigrant communities; a key
16 to achieving the goal is ensuring that immigrant
17 communities are able to access the broad city
18 services available to them and communicate with city
19 officials -- I'd like to stress that. The landmark
20 2011 Executive Order 120 that requires that City
21 agencies provided services in languages that ensure
22 that non-English speakers can access these services
23 was certainly progress, I would say.

24 But there are five key points that I
25 would like for the Council to consider.

1
2 1. This is an opportunity to codify the
3 language access Executive Order 120. While the Order
4 specifically states how the top six languages should
5 be determined, it currently does not state how
6 frequently these languages should be reassessed;
7 reassessment is vital, given that there are changing
8 demographics -- which we've sort of referenced now --
9 within New York City and our fast-growing
10 populations.

11 2. Int. 1181 creates the hypothetical of
12 an agency providing language services in 12
13 languages; however, given that 1181 does not require
14 the service be distributed to and collected from a
15 certain percent of the clientele population, the
16 results may not truly reflect the current [bell]
17 language access needs -- and if I could, just one
18 more.

19 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Absolutely. Thank
20 you.

21 TIFFANY WHEATLAND: So the current method
22 used in Executive Order 120 to determine the top
23 languages spoken in New York City does not take into
24 account a secondary language that may be spoken at
25 home by limited English proficiency speakers. So we

1 know that New York City is home to thousands of
2 immigrants, six languages is not sufficient; we
3 definitely are supporting and asking the Council to
4 consider inclusion of eight, which means also the
5 addition of French and Arabic. We just wanna say
6 that we're home to one of the largest immigrant
7 populations in the nation and it's important that
8 they're able to access the services that our city
9 offers and so we would ask the Council to strongly
10 consider codifying both the language access
11 protections and Executive Order 120 to increase that
12 floor of languages to eight at minimum. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you.

15 DONNA CHIU: Good afternoon Chair Kallos,
16 Council Member Levine; thank you to the Committee on
17 Governmental Operations. My name is Donna Chiu and
18 I'm the Director of Housing and Community Services at
19 Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE) and I'm giving
20 testimony today in support of Int. 1181.

21 AAFE is a nonprofit organization with
22 community offices based in and serving Chinatown and
23 the Lower East Side for the past 40 years. Recently
24 we've included satellite offices in Sunset Park,
25 Brooklyn, Jackson Heights and Flushing in Queens and

1 we pride ourselves in assisting New York's most
2 vulnerable residents, which includes senior citizens,
3 people with disabilities, working poor families, and
4 new immigrants. A majority of our clients are
5 monolingual Chinese or monolingual Spanish. AAFE is
6 also a member of the Stand for Tenant Safety, which
7 is citywide coalition, and through this work we've
8 interacted with the Department of Buildings and also
9 HPD on behalf of our clients.

11 Because I am a housing attorney and I'm a
12 native Cantonese speaker, I've had the pleasure of
13 assisting monolingual Cantonese-speaking New Yorkers
14 for the past 10 years, and I'm gonna limit my
15 comments today to The Speaker's initiative to expand
16 the categories of documents that have to be
17 translated in the top six languages.

18 Very briefly I wanted to show the members
19 today some of the documents that the clients come to
20 us for assistance with, because even though eight
21 years after the Executive Order 120 has been signed,
22 our most popular service remains translating letters.
23 And for example, and this is what I've done for my
24 clients as a housing attorney, is I've translated HPD
25 letters from the Emergency Repair Bureau; in the back

1 they'll provide translation in other languages, but
2 when I call the number it's disconnected, it doesn't
3 work, so this was last year, so that's an example of
4 a notice from HPD. Now for example, HPD sometimes
5 will also issue notices about the problems in their
6 apartment; in the back I can see that it's been
7 translated into Spanish, but any other [bell]
8 languages. And just very, very quickly, the last
9 example is; my client came to our office with a
10 document where they're requested to respond within
11 five days. We're happy to do that for our clients,
12 but we're worried about the people who can't get to
13 our office -- the senior citizens, the disabled
14 residents and the new immigrants who can't access us.
15 So thank you, Committee.

17 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you. If those
18 are copies, if you can hand them to a sergeant at
19 arms so that our committee can follow up with HPD,
20 and thank you for your support for STF [sic]. Next.
21 And we've been joined by Council Member Ritchie
22 Torres.

23 TSERING LAMA: Thank you for giving me
24 the opportunity. My name is Tsering Lama and I'm the
25 Language Justice and Domestic Worker Organizer at

1 Adhikaar. Adhikaar is the only women-led worker and
2 community center that serves and organizes the
3 Nepali-speaking immigrant and refugee community here.
4 We are the newest immigrant community in New York
5 City. I have provided Nepali and Tibetan
6 interpretation in high-risk legal, medical and school
7 situations, so from my firsthand experience, I know
8 that the city services can do much better to serve
9 our community with limited English proficient
10 individuals.
11

12 Three weeks ago I accompanied a long-time
13 community member as she attempted to navigate
14 communications with her son's emergency. Her son, an
15 11-year-old with special needs, needed additional
16 support while getting on the bus to come back home.
17 As situations escalated, the principal,
18 transportation officials; police officers all
19 struggled to simply get in touch with the mother, not
20 realizing that language access could be accessed; not
21 even having it on file that they needed to consider
22 this before moving to the next step. The child was
23 taken to the hospital and due to rushed admittance,
24 more than 24 hours passed before the child was
25 discharged. I was able to help navigate to the

1 hospital in Westchester, help a few calls and work
2 with officials. Many of these institutions should be
3 able to provide support to vulnerable mothers and
4 children like them, but instead, they are made to
5 feel out of place, like their limited English
6 capability was a reason to be cast aside and not
7 dealt with properly.

8
9 We seek to increase access in language
10 information and services by translating documents,
11 developing a core, group staff of trained
12 interpreters at Adhikaar. We have expanded the reach
13 of our classes and developed new resources, but we
14 need the City to do its part too. Every week we hear
15 from women trying to get help in situations of
16 domestic violence who make it to the website of city
17 services [bell] but end up staying in dangerous
18 situations because an interpreter wasn't available.
19 As more incident languages [sic], Nepali and Tibetan
20 are not covered by language access policies at city,
21 state and federal levels. We see the possibility of
22 the mother I work with not only to communicate during
23 emergency situations, but to one day comfortably
24 attend parent-teacher conferences. After more than
25 five years of accompanying her from one institution

1
2 to the next, we haven't seen an improvement. We urge
3 you to remember her story and consider the cases that
4 low-wage workers and our most vulnerable immigrant
5 families visit frequently. We need leadership to
6 take this responsibility and make it clear to all
7 parts of the system that language justice is a
8 priority. Thank you.

9 [background comments]

10 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Please remain; we
11 are still waiting on two folks who were asked to come
12 to this panel... [interpose, background comment] Okay.
13 So if you don't mind, just everyone get a little bit
14 friendlier and we'll... we're all fighting for the same
15 thing, so this is everyone who's in support; I don't
16 think anyone's in opposition, so if you don't mind
17 coming to the table.

18 [background comments]

19 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: And if you were at
20 the table, just... we'll bring another chair up, but...
21 [laugh, background comment] Yes, please. You may
22 begin.

23 OMAR KORETA: Good afternoon everyone and
24 thank you for the opportunity for letting us here
25 today.

1 My name is Omar Koreta [sp?]; I'm
2 speaking on behalf of African Communities Together.
3 My goal today is for you to reconsider other
4 languages, including Arabic, French and African
5 dialects. It is really important because I have done
6 a few translations for African parents. For example,
7 we have kids that are dropping out in our community
8 that really need real translation of important things
9 that are going on in schools. So for that being the
10 matter, we do really need African languages to be
11 part of the community so that we can actually help
12 our kids. When you look at the South Bronx, for
13 example, when you look at the records, you will see
14 that there are tons of African young kids that are
15 dropping out of school; it's not because they are not
16 smart or they don't know what they're doing.

17 **[inaudible]**, some of them, they don't have the real
18 actual information how to share with their parents so
19 that they can actually do better.
20

21 Another issue is; I have done translation
22 for lawyers, and even Columbia University, on issues
23 which are language access issues. If we had African
24 languages or dialects, that will help to strengthen
25 some of those issues; it would resolve most of these

1 communication issues within the city and it will also
2 improve the lives of new arrivals of Africans.

3
4 And to furthermore, I think it would be
5 much easier if we have an easy access of African
6 dialects, including Arabic and French speakers, to be
7 able to access city language access, just like any
8 other language access to enhance and improve the
9 lives of newcomers and also [bell] to make everyone
10 to be on the same platform in terms of communication.
11 And thank you very much for your time.

12 LAWRENCE BUREH: Good afternoon everyone.
13 My name is Lawrence Bureh [sp?]; I'm here today to
14 represent the African Communities Together in regards
15 to language barrier, which is African language and
16 other official languages, like French and Arabic.

17 So the important issue or the important
18 reason why we want you to consider those languages in
19 our community is; language is very important and
20 language barrier brings an impasse within the
21 community and within organizations, so if those
22 barriers are moved out, will make us, brought us, we
23 need to understand each other and we need to
24 understand the societies and organizations of each
25 other. So in many occasions African children are

1 finding complications or difficulties to come into
2 the society because of their language barrier. So
3 but if we are able to penetrate to the organizations
4 through understanding each other's languages or some
5 of those official languages, like French, which is
6 one of the main official languages that the African
7 community migrates with, and Arabic, we highly
8 appreciate so that our community will remain strong
9 and comfortable to walk into the foreign
10 organizations or foreign corporations and foreign
11 educational societies. So therefore we are actually
12 appealing, it's been a long time; we'll try to
13 forward these issues, but we've not been able to
14 successfully accomplish it, so today is another
15 opportunity we are appealing on behalf of our
16 community to highly consider those languages as part
17 of the formal language to the official English
18 language in the United States and [bell] especially
19 in New York. Thank you so much for listening.

21 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you very much
22 to this large and distinguished panel; to Council
23 Member Mark Levine.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: This is such an
25 important message that I heard I think from almost

1 every member of this panel, which is that there are
2 thousands and thousands of speakers of languages
3 other than the core six which are not being
4 adequately served and just to clarify, 'cause it was
5 uncertain in my previous questioning; the core six
6 languages are Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Italian,
7 Russian -- sorry; I had that wrong -- I'll have to
8 get back to you on that; Italian is not one of them.
9 [background comments] Sorry, Bengali and..
10 [background comment] and Haitian Creole. Thank you.
11 You all identified French and Arabic as being glaring
12 omissions from that list; I'm wondering if any or all
13 of you could weigh in with what you see as the
14 highest priority languages that are not included and
15 if you could even estimate the number of speakers who
16 comprise that language community, that would be
17 helpful, and maybe gentlemen, if you could start with
18 -- could you estimate how many French and/or Arabic
19 speakers who are not English proficient there are in
20 the city?
21

22 OMAR KORETA: From me?

23 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Sure. Please,
24 sir.
25

2 OMAR KORETA: Sure. I mean, when you
3 look at the dynamics of the Bronx, for example, and
4 when you look at the map of West Africa, for example,
5 you have more French-speaking countries than English;
6 English is only six, if I'm not mistaken. So out of
7 the 14, the rest are all French, so you will find
8 more French speakers in the Bronx more than any other
9 language. When I say French, sometimes we say French
10 but they are not fluent in the French itself, so
11 that's why we are trying to include the dialects also
12 to be like a backup. So in the Bronx, I will say for
13 example, I can say more than even 20-30,000 people
14 that speak either Arabic or French. If you have,
15 let's say, a population of 50,000 you might find
16 like... [crosstalk]

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: And that's just
18 in the Bronx?

19 OMAR KORETA: Just in the Bronx.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: That's
21 incredible. And what is the most common dialect; is
22 it Wolof or is there another one?

23 OMAR KORETA: Well I would say Wolof is a
24 highly unit [sic] in the Bronx. For example, in
25 Senegambia, like when you combine Senegal and Gambia,

2 most people tend to speak Wolof because it's like a
3 social language... [crosstalk]

4 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Right.

5 OMAR KORETA: almost everyone coming
6 **[inaudible]**, but there are other dialects. But let's
7 start with Wolof, for example, and then you go to
8 Mandingo and Mandinka. Mandingo is spoken in Guinea,
9 is spoken in Gambia, is spoken in Senegal; is spoken
10 in any other African country **[inaudible]**... [crosstalk]

11 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Could you
12 estimate the number of Wolof or Mandingo speakers in
13 the city or in the Bronx at least?

14 OMAR KORETA: Well my estimate; I might
15 be accurate, but through my own observation, I'll say
16 about 15-20.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: 15-20,000?

18 OMAR KORETA: Right...

19 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Okay.

20 OMAR KORETA: or even more.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Very helpful.
22 Would anyone else... yes, please.

23 CECILIA GASTON: I'd like to make a
24 comment. We had a victim of domestic violence in a
25 precinct in the Bronx from Africa; she was fluent in

1 French and yet the precinct kept her in the precinct
2 overnight and they brought a Haitian Creole
3 interpreter.
4

5 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Right.

6 CECILIA GASTON: So it goes to the
7 quality, the comprehension of what language access
8 actually means.

9 TIFFANY WHEATLAND: I was wondering if I
10 could just say one more thing. I'm glad that you
11 mentioned Wolof because that's a very important
12 language area, but there is another barrier that's
13 actually impacting particularly the African immigrant
14 community, but it's the systematic undercounts of the
15 U.S. Census that make it so that we don't really know
16 -- we have undercounts of the last two Census
17 administrations and there are definitely more people
18 represented here of African descent than recorded,
19 and so that is also contributing to the fact that we
20 don't have accurate numbers of how many speakers we
21 have, but the numbers are definitely underreported
22 and I think that that's why it's so imperative that
23 we really make sure that we pass this legislation.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Good to know. I
25 wanna... sure, go ahead, sir.

1
2 LAWRENCE BUREH: Yeah, in terms of
3 language population, we estimate about 26,000 Arabic
4 speakers and 24,000 African language speakers and
5 32,000 of French speakers in New York.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: That's citywide?

7 LAWRENCE BUREH: Yeah, citywide.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Okay, very
9 helpful to have. So that was over 100,000, it seems,
10 combined; that's very, very helpful.

11 Now did you have anything on the Asian
12 language front? If you could grab the mic, yeah.

13 DONNA CHIU: Council Member, I actually
14 wanted to add, if Russian wasn't one of the top six
15 languages; definitely in my neighborhood of Bath
16 Beach and also where I used to live, Sheepshead Bay,
17 Brighton Beach, Russian is becoming a large community
18 and also, I know because my daughter's in a school
19 where they teach her Russian and so the Russian
20 parents are also LEP or monolingual Russians; that's
21 what I have to add, Council Member.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Okay. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: I'm gonna echo that
24 and there's now more Russian-speaking folks on the
25 Upper East Side; in my household, at least.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: In your
3 household. Okay. A census of one? [laugh]
4 Alright.

5 TSERING LAMA: For the Nepali- and
6 Tibetan-speaking community, I know there has been an
7 increase in Queens, so I can make a very general
8 estimate, about like 40-50,000 just in Queens..

9 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Wow.

10 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: so the need for
11 language access is tremendous, so... Yeah, so that's
12 very general and I don't think there is... we don't
13 have a census on the population, so yeah.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: But it is
15 incredible that even a language that is seemingly --
16 I'll put it in quotes -- "minor"...

17 TSERING LAMA: Right.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: as Tibetan could
19 have tens of thousands of speakers.

20 TSERING LAMA: Right.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: and more than
22 that potentially citywide, so I think it just points
23 to how critical it is that we broaden the circle of
24 languages that we're providing translation services
25 for, so.

[background comments]

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Yes.

[background comments]

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Indeed. Indeed.

[inaudible]. Alright.

OMAR KORETA: I just wanted to add one more thing to the language. The reason why some of these numbers are being underestimated is because the survey that they use, what they send with the kids to home, normally most of these African parents, they don't actually mark the right box, because if I speak, if I know how to even speak one word in English, I'll say only send me information in English, so basically that's one other reason why some of these languages are underestimated; they are not recorded as they are were supposed to be recorded. If they could do another different type of survey whereby they can say spoken, but would you like other languages, for example; you will get a better feedback than the way they normally do it.

COUNCIL MEMBER LEVINE: Alright. Thank you panel and thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: I'd like to excuse the panel. Thank you.

1
2 Next up we have Maria R from Friends of
3 Sunset Park; Christine C from Legal Services NYC...
4 [interpose, background comments] Naved H from CAAAV;
5 [background comment] Roxanne T from CAAAV;
6 [background comments] last name Ramen from ACT.
7 [background comments] Is there... [background comment]
8 let's just check with the sergeant at arms; is there
9 an overflow room where folks are watching?
10 [background comments] Where are they waiting?
11 [background comments] So that's not acceptable; I...
12 so if the sergeant at arms can just make sure we know
13 when there are folks who are not allowed in, we
14 could've brought folks in to make sure that they're
15 heard. So I see at least eight seats, so if we can -
16 - I see a lot of vacant seats; can we bring the eight
17 people up from the lobby? And let me see if there's
18 one other person we can add to this panel. Last name
19 Berry from ACT. [background comments] If you begin.
20 And we'll apologize when the folks get here who were
21 waiting downstairs. Thank you.

22 MARIA ROCA: I'm Maria Roca, founder of
23 Friends of Sunset Park and I'm here by pure
24 serendipity. I was here earlier this morning to
25 support greater funding for parks, funding just for

1
2 parks [sic] and as I exited the building I had the
3 good fortune of running into the ACT folks -- and I
4 can't find your card; I need another card, the
5 gentleman who is in the front -- and that caught my
6 eye and fortunately I was free for the afternoon.

7 Sunset Park has always been diverse,
8 always a working class immigrant community from day
9 one, day one and yet we seem to, after all these many
10 years, decades, centuries, not grasp the importance
11 to the community's economic, social, safety,
12 security, stability to make sure that each and
13 everyone of our neighbors are included, included in
14 the activities of the neighborhood, included in the
15 politics of the neighborhood, included in the
16 educational process in the neighborhood. So I'm
17 happy to see that the City has made great progress,
18 'cause I'm older than just about everyone here and I
19 can tell you stories about when I arrived in the city
20 as an immigrant, as a non-English-speaking immigrant
21 in the 1960s. So we are on the right road but
22 there's... So I just took some notes and I went to have
23 lunch, came back, as I said I would, and this is not
24 really prepared because I'm not...

2 Okay, but language access, and first and
3 foremost, I want to open up our minds and remember
4 that language access is not just on print; we have
5 and have always had a great gap in literacy with our
6 immigrants, [bell] and I beg you, one more minute.
7 And so to open... like one... two sec... [crosstalk]

8 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: If you can... If you
9 can wrap up so that we can...

10 MARIA ROCA: two more... two more
11 sentences, okay? Greater use of the visual media so
12 that if it's TV, if it's radio and screens all over
13 the city, in the schools; wherever people congregate,
14 in their language because many people do not read or
15 write the language they speak and that is the fault
16 of their government of origin, who have no care and
17 more so with women. So we have a great ability to
18 include... [interpose]

19 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Okay, thank you.

20 MARIA ROCA: So... at high schools, at
21 community colleges, CUNY, as a recruitment of
22 translators in training, often the young people who
23 have recently arrived and their native language is
24 still very fresh in their lives. Pop-ups, someone
25

1 Council is intending to introduce legislation which
 2 will actually require agencies to provide language
 3 services; I am concerned that the language of the
 4 bill as written may not actually be interpreted to do
 5 this. I think that language of the framework that's
 6 suitable for an executive order may not be equally
 7 suited to legislation.
 8

9 I'm gonna blow through some examples.
 10 Int. 1181 does not include a private right of action;
 11 it is crucial that LEP individuals who are personally
 12 affected by a failure or a refusal to provide
 13 language services be able to sue to enforce their
 14 rights -- thank you. We all remember the Equal
 15 Access to Human Services Act, which a lot of people
 16 in this room fought really hard for; that act was
 17 held to be unenforceable by the New York Supreme
 18 Court and the Appellate Division because of a lack of
 19 this kind of language.

20 I'm also concerned that some of the
 21 language of the bill actually requires less of
 22 agencies in existing federal and city human rights
 23 laws, particularly with respect to what documents
 24 need to be translated and what language this
 25 interpretation needs to be given in. Federal law,

1 including also the New York State Executive Order, do
2 not put a limit on how many languages need to be
3 interpreted, particularly when every City agency has
4 access to LanguageLine. Federal law also considers,
5 in determining what documents should be translated,
6 the importance of the service in question and the
7 importance of the communication; not how frequently
8 it's disseminated to the public. So I think that
9 there's a possibility that the language in this law
10 is below what is already required by federal law.

12 And then, I absolutely do not think that
13 there is any intention in the interaction of this
14 bill to narrow the existing requirements placed on
15 City agencies by the New York City Human Rights Law;
16 that this is not intended to reduce the obligation of
17 agencies, [bell] but I don't see any language in the
18 bill that says that. Thank you.

19 NAVED HUSAIN: Wow.

20 [laugh]

21 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you.

22 [laughter]

23 NAVED HUSAIN: Is this on? Okay. Good
24 afternoon, Council Members Kallos, Levine, Torres;

25

1 Council for listening to our... for being here for this
2 hearing; thank you everybody for being here.

3
4 My name is Naved Husain; I am the Lead
5 Organizer at CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities;
6 we've been around since 1986, working with low-income
7 Asian immigrant refugee communities in New York City.
8 So when Executive Order 120 came out, we were
9 actually one of the many organizations who fought and
10 supported Executive Order 120 and we are very much in
11 support of it still, we think it's a great law and
12 the reason we're here is we want to address an
13 additional expansion on Executive Order 120 as it
14 applies to agencies.

15 Since Executive Order 120, CAAAV, our
16 organization, has been working with Bangladeshi,
17 Korean and Chinese-speaking immigrants who live in
18 public housing, in NYCHA; in Queensbridge, in
19 particular, and we have documented in this report
20 last year -- which is available on www.caaav.org --
21 the difficulties that these limited English
22 proficient immigrant tenants deal with NYCHA; it's
23 already difficult as an English-speaking tenant to
24 get repairs and services done when you speak English;
25 it's another level of difficulty, as my colleague

1 Roxanne will point out in her testimony, when you
2 don't speak English.
3

4 So we would hope that the Executive Order
5 can be expanded to also keep NYCHA accountable as the
6 City agency -- we're talking about 600,000 New
7 Yorkers that live in NYCHA housing -- that's almost
8 the population of Boston -- of which 20,000 we know
9 are Asian immigrants and many of them are LEP, so
10 just some numbers quickly.

11 We released a report; we did a major
12 survey of tenants living in various NYCHA
13 developments; we found that over half -- Asian
14 tenants -- we found that over half (54%) did not
15 receive any translation from NYCHA [bell] upon
16 request; in addition, more than 70% of non-English-
17 speaking tenants have not been able to talk to
18 someone who spoke their language when they called
19 NYCHA's Customer Contact Center to request a repair.
20 So we've talked to tenants and here are some
21 suggestions or recommendations they have for
22 Int. 1181; is that it should be required that
23 agencies such as NYCHA should provide interpretation
24 and translation services, training their workers and
25 creating public awareness strategies; that they

1 should survey and collect accurate data on languages
2 spoken in households; they should also expand the
3 current languages of English, Spanish, Russian, and
4 Chinese -- top six -- to include -- I think it does
5 include Korean, but if not; Korean and Bengali and
6 Urdu, to require that agencies such as NYCHA have
7 office hours in language at developments with
8 language needs or someone at the agency who can
9 travel to the different sites with designated office
10 hours. There are further... [interpose]

12 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Could you conclude?

13 NAVED HUSAIN: yes -- there are further
14 recommendations in our report, "No Access" -- again,
15 www.caaav.org, and Roxanne Chang, my colleague, will
16 talk about an example of dealing with tenant language
17 access difficulties. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Sure. I just wanna
19 take one moment; I want to apologize to the eight or
20 so folks who were waiting downstairs; thank you for
21 waiting so very long, almost an hour-and-a-half in
22 the lobby; that was not acceptable; should not have
23 happened; I want to apologize to you as Committee
24 Chair and on behalf of the Council. No one has a
25 right to make you wait downstairs or in another

1 location. Should the City Council ever not let you
2 in again, please be sure to just ask if they can set
3 up an overflow room; that is something that we do
4 normally. To the organizers in the room, do not let
5 anyone say no; if you bring 100 people, then we need
6 to accommodate 100 people, so just let us know; we'll
7 work with you and make sure that everyone is heard
8 and everyone has access and everyone can participate.
9 This City Council is the people's house. On to our
10 next speaker. Thank you.

12 ROXANNE CHANG: Good afternoon everyone;
13 I'm Roxanne from CAAAV Organizing Asian Communities
14 and I work as the Chinatown [sic] organizer at
15 Queensbridge Housing in Long Island City.

16 So as was stated in our testimony, you
17 know our Asian immigrant tenants face additional
18 obstacles in accessing services because these
19 services are not available in the tenants' spoken
20 languages. I'm here today to share with you the
21 tenants' experiences I have witnessed in my work.

22 So this picture comes from my encounter
23 with Mr. [inaudible] at the Queensbridge [inaudible]
24 management office; he had just left a meeting with
25 one of the staff at the management office; on the

1 paper, Mr. [inaudible] is holding in this picture, it
2 shows the pictures Mr. [inaudible] had drawn to try
3 to communicate with the management office staff about
4 the repairs needed in his apartment; on the bottom of
5 the page was the staff's response to Mr. [inaudible]
6 request; it says: "You need to find a technician to
7 answer these questions." This [inaudible] caused by
8 the lack of language access is a gross violation of
9 Mr. [inaudible] as well as any other tenant's rights.
10 Unfortunately, this is only one of the many cases
11 where NYCHA tenants with limited English proficiency
12 have been challenged in the system.

14 The pile of papers I have here are sheets
15 where [inaudible] tenants have been turned away from
16 the management office by staff; tenants were back
17 week after week for an entire month before I had met
18 with them and were able to help them communicate with
19 the staff at the management office.

20 I cannot emphasize how important it is
21 for you to support Int. 1181-2016 to continue the
22 mission to expand language access that is embedded in
23 Executive Order 120 and to consider including NYCHA
24 as one of the City agencies that will be mandated.

25 Thank you.

1 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you.

2 TRANSLATOR: Okay, pretty much I'm gonna
3 translate for him [background comments].

4 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Okay. If both of
5 you can sit down and if our translator can also make
6 sure you state your name [bell]. And we'll give
7 additional time for the translation. So we'll run
8 the clock twice so that you get your full two minutes
9 and try to make sure that the translation is also two
10 minutes in length.

11 BARRY: **[01:22:02] French** [background
12 comment]

13 TRANSLATOR: Good afternoon everybody.
14 My name is Barry and I'm very pleased and happy to be
15 here on behalf of the African Community Together.
16 Now it's very important for us to have French,
17 especially as a language, because as you know, a lot
18 of Africans, especially West Africans here, who need
19 that language in order to navigate the healthcare as
20 well as the educational system here.

21 BARRY: **[01:23:16] French**

22 TRANSLATOR: I looked at myself as an
23 example; I used to be a teacher for over 20 years
24 back home and when I try to navigate the system here,
25

1 I see that there's a lot of opportunities for me to
2 just do what I was doing at home, but the fact that I
3 don't have access to this language not yet is a very
4 big handicap for me.

6 BARRY: Okay. **[01:24:05] French**

7 TRANSLATOR: Just another example is when
8 I try to navigate the healthcare system just to have
9 an appointment to see a PCP, it's a hassle; it just
10 takes way longer than others to get just an
11 appointment.

12 BARRY: **[01:24:34] French**

13 TRANSLATOR: Okay. Thank you; I will
14 stop there and thank you very much for giving us the
15 opportunity to voice our opinions. Thank you very
16 much.

17 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Merci beaucoup.
18 Thank you. For the next panel. Our next panel
19 includes Jo-Ann Y from the Asian American Federation;
20 M. Kamara from an organization that begins with an S;
21 K. Kamara from that same organization. [background
22 comments] L. Doman from ACT; thank you for joining
23 us, and I wouldn't do the disservice of trying to
24 pronounce it -- A B D O U. [background comments]
25 Thank you. And I hope it's acceptable that I'd

1
2 rather spell the names or say the letters [background
3 comments] than offend with mispronunciation. Whoever
4 would like to go first.

5 [background comments]

6 JO-ANN YOO: Can you hear... better? Thank
7 you very much Council Member Kallos. This hearing is
8 incredibly important, especially now, as we talk
9 about the changing times of our country and the
10 impact it will have on the citizens of this city.

11 My name is Jo-Ann Yoo; I'm the Executive
12 Director of the Asian American Federation. We work
13 with over 60 social services groups that serve the
14 Pan-Asian community.

15 Asian American population is the fastest
16 growing in New York City and we grow almost 3% a year
17 -- that's calculated from 2010 to 2015. Asians now
18 represent 10% or more of the residents in 26 out of
19 the 51 council districts. In our community, 70% are
20 immigrants and despite the fact that we have been
21 challenged by the Asian American, the model minority
22 stereotype, the City's own estimate from the Center
23 for Economic Opportunity shows that 1 in 4 Asians
24 live in poverty, Asian households are less likely to
25 receive assistance, and only 31% of Asian households

1 that meet the income requirements for SNAP actually
2 receive them. And -- I just wanna shorten my
3 testimony -- we request that -- having worked on the
4 language access Executive Order a long, long time
5 ago, when it was first a vision -- I think now it the
6 time for us to look at expansion and we believe that
7 Asian American Federation, we believe that the
8 language should go from six to ten and we believe
9 that once the language is covered by the language
10 access law it should stay. I know that whenever
11 languages -- you know we look at, for instance, you
12 know the top six languages are Arabic, Chinese,
13 Haitian-Creole, Korean, and Russian and Spanish, but
14 you know if you look at the population you might say
15 well, you know, do you take Arabic off, but we know
16 that in the Arabic, you know the language [bell]
17 proficiency in the community might be a little bit
18 lower, so we think you need to keep that language and
19 add other languages. Our recommendation for the
20 Asian community is Hindi, Urdu; Bengali. We realize
21 that we need to be able to shuffle those language
22 decks not every ten years or every 15 years, but it
23 needs to be done regularly; our population changes
24
25

1 regularly; we need to look at that. But one thing I
2 wanna stress... [interpose]

3
4 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: If you could wrap up
5 **[inaudible]**... [crosstalk]

6 JO-ANN YOO: Absolutely. I would like to
7 say we've all been taxed to the hilt because of what
8 is happening and we are the information brokers for
9 our community about what is happening; language
10 access, this conversation cannot come at a more
11 relevant time because there is panic happening in our
12 community and people are having conversations about
13 leaving this country and I think... we applaud your
14 efforts, the City Council's efforts to take the
15 leadership on this, especially when this is the
16 scariest time that many of us have ever experienced.
17 So thank you for this opportunity.

18 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you. And
19 thank you to those who choose to stay and fight for
20 what's right and fight for a country where all
21 are welcome.

22 ABDOU CHAY: Hi, good afternoon
23 **[inaudible]**. My name is Abdou Chay [sp?] from
24 African Communities Together. So I'm here to
25 express, like share what I have experienced before,

1 because my GED, like high school equivalence, was
2 provided in French when the GED was like hard paper,
3 but now I'm not sure what is included in this
4 computerized system, but after I graduated my GED, I
5 went to a college and after my associate's, I'm
6 returning back the service they give me to the city
7 right now, because I am, like right now, working with
8 some high schools to do like computer science, like
9 other computer technician, well like too many high
10 schools in the city, and you know, the **[inaudible]**
11 not great family [sic], just like, you know,
12 internship with them. So that means like if you
13 added those programs, if you added those languages,
14 it's not gonna be just one way, it's gonna be two-way
15 routes, so the City's gonna be actually, you know,
16 gain benefit from that service and we also gonna
17 benefit from that service. Because like many of us
18 are scared, like when we go out, like trying to be
19 part of the city, they not include our languages and
20 it's gonna be so hard and our country is like -- we
21 are always scared when we are not included, so when
22 we are included we're gonna be like happy to be part
23 of it. And you know, like some of you are gonna say
24 okay, once we provide the language, who's gonna be
25

1
2 like the... the people that gonna be willing to work
3 with that -- thank you [sic]. Like personally, we,
4 the African community together have many people that
5 are gonna be willing and you know, perfect, like you
6 know, are gonna be fit in those jobs, if you provide
7 it, to be a translator between two languages; we all
8 have those people, qualified and well-trained, to be,
9 like you know, translated English to all the... like
10 you know, all the languages that in part of our
11 community together; that's what I wanna share. Thank
12 you so much for giving opportunity to speak.

13 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you; next.

14 [bell]

15 MASSANGE KAMARA: Okay. Hello. My name
16 is Massange Kamara; I am the Legal Services Case
17 Manager at Sauti Yetu Center for African Women and
18 Families.

19 Sauti Yetu is a community-based
20 organization that works to mobilize African immigrant
21 women to strengthen their families to improve their
22 communities and the quality of their life.

23 French and Arabic are common languages
24 spoken among our clients, including many different
25

1
2 African dialects, which include Soussou, Mandingo,
3 Soninke, Bambara, and Mandingo.

4 As a case manager at Sauti Yetu, my
5 clients are always telling me it's always about how
6 they aren't provided language access at a lot of
7 social agencies such as hospitals, with APS [sic],
8 children's schools. We have parents who are coming
9 to us telling us about how they are not able to
10 participate in their children's education; a lot of
11 the students are dropping out, but the parents are
12 not aware of the issues that are leading to those
13 because they are not able to participate. They are
14 receiving phone calls and letters in English or
15 Spanish and they're not able to communicate with the
16 school. In order for students to succeed in their
17 education, we need the participation of their parents
18 and the schools and that's impossible if there is no
19 communication happening between the two parties.

20 Also, we help victims of violence; a lot
21 of our clients who've experienced abuse from their
22 partners, they are unable to get help because a lot
23 of the time when they call NYPD and they show up,
24 their partner is the one who speaks English; we've
25 actually had clients who've been arrested for calling

1
2 the police because their husband ends up talking
3 instead of the client because they cannot express
4 themselves. Because of this, a lot of our clients
5 [bell] experience this abuse.

6 So not having language access really
7 compromises the safety of our clients; it limits the
8 ability to experience their full potential in this
9 country; also, to participate in the improvement of
10 the New York community as a whole [sic].

11 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you.

12 LANESA DURAMON: Good afternoon. My name
13 is Lanesa Duramon [sp?]; I'm a member of African
14 Communities Together. And just to add on what
15 Massange and Abdou were saying on the importance of
16 having Arabic and French as available languages to
17 all New Yorkers, I work at a legal service provider
18 as well and I find myself having to also accompany
19 clients and even just, you know my family and members
20 of my community, in order to interpret for them. I
21 get calls from other organizations asking me to
22 volunteer my time as well to translate, in Arabic
23 especially. So I just wanna stress the importance of
24 adding those languages because there is a real need
25 for this and there's only so many of us in the

1 community that are able to really make the time and
2 dedicate ourselves to being there for our community
3 members and helping them out and providing those
4 services. So it would really be appreciated if also
5 our city and our government services were able to
6 help us in that aspect.

8 KUJEGI: Hello. My name is Kujegi [sp?];
9 I am an employee of Sauti Yetu, which is a member of
10 African Communities Together and I'm gonna be
11 appealing to the Council from a personal note.

12 I am the daughter of Gambian immigrants
13 and growing up in the City, language access was very
14 personal. Although I was born in the U.S. and had
15 the privilege of speaking and learning English and
16 being able to navigate many spaces, because of that
17 privilege, that so did not happen for my mother. I
18 remember my mother not feeling welcomed in schools
19 and hospitals because she could not speak English and
20 in these situations my mother would express
21 discomfort and embarrassment. As a young child, I
22 was thrust into the position of translating for my
23 mother and giving my mom the dignity she deserved in
24 otherwise humiliating situations. Access to
25 languages such as French, Arabic, Wolof, Mandinka,

1 Hausa, Twi, and Fulani is crucial in ensuring all
2 immigrants of all backgrounds are included and
3 interwoven into the fabric of the city. We say that
4 New York is a city of immigrants and a sanctuary
5 city, a safe haven for immigrants and in this post-
6 Trump era, this needs to be held true and every more
7 true for all immigrants; languages are what bind
8 people together, help build communities and are
9 essential in how immigrant communities find home in a
10 foreign place; I am a testament to that. It is
11 essential that we provide languages, particularly
12 African languages, as well in schools, hospitals;
13 other public settings, to ensure the dignity of these
14 people like my mother. Immigrant communities matter,
15 we matter and my mother matters and our African
16 languages matter too; it is only our human right.

17
18 And I want to talk about a Coca-Cola ad
19 that had a diverse range of languages speaking and
20 there was so much controversy about that and some
21 people who were against the ad were saying American.
22 I speak English, so I never had to doubt that and I
23 felt... and I was thinking in my head, oh but the ideal
24 is that because we live in this city, my mother can
25 speak any language and still be American and I want

1 my mother to speak in Soninke and still be American.
2 Thank you.

3 [bell]

4 [clapping]

5 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you -- please
6 remain -- and we are all American, if you're here in
7 the city, we are New Yorkers first and foremost and I
8 don't think anyone has a problem with that [laughter]
9 we're Americans and we are American; I think that
10 this hearing is something that folks should take
11 notice of, and just thank you for sharing your
12 experiences.
13

14 We touched on this in the first panel
15 about the sheer number of interpretation requests
16 that we're seeing with the NYPD -- if anyone on the
17 panel can just go into some of the details -- so when
18 somebody of limited English proficiency is requesting
19 interpretation, how does that work with the NYPD, if
20 you have specific examples of that experience?

21 MASSANGE KAMARA: Uhm...

22 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: And if you can turn
23 on the mic.

24 MASSANGE KAMARA: Alright. So I don't
25 really know how it works, but we've just had many

1 clients come to us of how they've called NYPD because
2 they were being abused by their partner and when the
3 police show up and it's the two of them in the home,
4 the husband ends up telling the story. In this
5 instance, the husband told the police that he was the
6 one that was attacked, but the wife is the one who
7 called the police but she was just unable to call the
8 police, I guess, to express herself. So I guess
9 instead of like calling interpretation to hear from
10 the wife's side of the story, they didn't do that;
11 they ended up arresting her and didn't hear from her.
12 So just right on the spot they don't like provide
13 interpretation; they just act; this is very wrong.

15 JO-ANN YOO: This is actually a question
16 that I had asked **[inaudible]** -- I apologize -- and
17 they said, "You know we have those "I speak this
18 language" cards, so everybody can take a card." I
19 have to tell you, you know, when you're in an
20 emergency situation, the last thing you're gonna do
21 is pull out a card and point to a language that you
22 speak and what if your language isn't listed? I
23 think the challenge shouldn't be on the victim, it
24 shouldn't be on -- I think the City -- New York City
25 can do a better job, I mean that's just the bottom

1 line; this is -- you know, we are so proud of our
2 identity as an immigrant city and yet you know you're
3 asking people to pull out a card and show you "I
4 speak this language" is -- you know, that's not
5 acceptable. I think one of the things we talk about
6 in the advocacy community, you know we laugh about,
7 is the fact that some of this stuff looks like it
8 comes from Google Translate, you know and it's like
9 the big joke that we have... [crosstalk]

11 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: It does.

12 [laughter, background comments]

13 JO-ANN YOO: Yes. Yes. And the other
14 challenge is that, you know one of the
15 recommendations we made is, you know how do we review
16 the quality of the translations, because you know the
17 language that the advocates and the community speak
18 is something very different than a translator
19 submits. Sometimes a translator documents -- it's
20 very, very formal and you know, I have folks who read
21 it and you know, I have my father read the documents,
22 like the Korean documents that sometimes I get and he
23 says, "I'm not sure if a very, very high level," like
24 a college degree; nobody says things like this, this
25 is so formal and if you wanna communicate through a

1 flyer or information, it has to be more colloquial;
2 the language that the people speak every day. There
3 is no review of that, and then, when we talk about
4 some of the LanguageLine issues with services, you
5 know we've talked... I've heard from our member
6 agencies some of the challenges, that if the person
7 who speaks your language isn't there to serve you,
8 you have to come back another day and you know that
9 -- you're an older person looking to get some help
10 somewhere and the person happens... the one person who
11 speaks your language; instead he's gotta come back
12 again and again and again or sometimes you're made to
13 wait until that person is available. I mean these
14 are realities that immigrant communities face.

16 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: To the extent folks
17 here or watching online have specific ideas on
18 language access specifically in criminal justice type
19 situations, I think that's a tough situation because
20 your rights can be violated by somebody who is in all
21 cases trying to do their best but doesn't know what
22 to do with a person who is speaking a language that
23 they can't identify and so to the extent we can work
24 together, this needs to be a city where everyone of
25 every language is able to have protection from the

2 police and be protected from the police in both
3 cases. So if we can't all communicate, again, it is
4 a problem. Thank you very much this panel. We have
5 two more panels. I just wanna thank everyone for
6 their cooperation in keeping testimony short so we
7 can give everyone a chance to speak.

8 Aber K, the Arab American Association;
9 Lawrence B, ACT; A U D U, K, ACT; Catherine B,
10 Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York; Peter
11 Gee, The Door.

12 And please make sure to get these slips
13 of paper into us; we're about to hit our last panel;
14 if you do not have a... [interpose, background comment]
15 and you won't get a chance to speak.

16 For those of you who now wish to speak or
17 watching online, watching after the fact, you can
18 submit your testimony to BKallos@BenKallos.com; we
19 will get it into the record and specifically with
20 great testimony like some of what we've heard today
21 with specific changes to the legislation suggested.
22 Please begin when you wish.

23 [background comments]

24 ABER KAWAS: Okay. Hi everyone. My name
25 is Aber Kawas; I'm the Lead Advocacy Organizer at the

1 Arab American Association of New York. We are
2 located in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn and we are the largest
3 Arab American community in New York City and we're
4 the largest legal service provider in South Brooklyn;
5 that's including parts of Bay Ridge, Dyker Heights,
6 Bensonhurst, and Gravesend. We also provide services
7 to Arab Americans in Staten Island and Sunset Park,
8 to Arab Americans and Arab immigrants and refugees,
9 and we serve about 35,000 Arabic-speaking people in
10 our area.
11

12 So I'm here to express our recommendation
13 to improving access to city services for limited
14 English proficient individuals. As an organization
15 that serves the Arab community, we're disappointed
16 that Arabic and French, two languages that are
17 extremely integral for our community, are not
18 included amongst the six top spoken languages in New
19 York City and we're asking for comprehensive language
20 access legislation; this is for French and Arabic,
21 but also for other languages that also serve one of
22 our largest communities and Muslim communities, so
23 languages such as Urdu or you know, something that
24 would be specific to Muslim populated parts of the
25 world.

1
2 So specifically we're asking the City to
3 increase the number of citywide top languages from
4 six to eight; we wanna include French and Arabic;
5 this would serve our Middle Eastern, North African
6 clients and community members and would improve the
7 way that agencies do language use of surveys to
8 ensure the need for African languages to be captured
9 in any other languages like I mentioned.

10 The groundwork is already set for this to
11 be done; there are some agencies around the city,
12 like the Department of Education and the Commission
13 of Human Rights, who are already translating these
14 documents into Arabic and other languages, so the
15 precedent has been set; I think it takes cooperation
16 between community organizations and the City
17 agencies.

18 As the child of two Arabic-speaking
19 immigrant parents, and as somebody who's an advocate
20 for the Arabic and [bell] Muslim community, we have
21 witnessed just hundreds of people not being able to
22 apply for social services, their licenses, read their
23 school notices, and be able to identify resources,
24 and I do wanna make a note that -- we were talking
25 about public safety -- as you all may have heard in

1 the past week, and -- you know, actually in the past
2 several months, there has been an increase in hate
3 crimes, an increase in attacks on our community
4 members; I do have to say that we often encounter
5 difficulties when people are trying to report
6 something that is happening and the officers who are
7 speaking to them don't necessarily understand the
8 language in the initial report; that we have to go
9 back and translate and bring an advocate in to help
10 them with that. We also have had -- as you know, the
11 Muslim community has had some, you know, a rough
12 history with the New York City Police Department and
13 so when it comes to instances where there is a case
14 that is involving terror charges or surveillance,
15 etc., we also -- you know we wanna ensure that there
16 is really good translation services provided and
17 maybe even from an outside source, you know, just a
18 translator who's not bias to the agency to be in
19 that... [interpose]

21 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you.

22 ABER KAWAS: so I just wanted to mention
23 them.

24 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you. You're
25 out of time; can you submit that testimony?

2 ABER KAWAS: Yes, I can submit it. Okay.
3 Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Perfect. Thank you.

5 AUDU KADERY: Good afternoon everyone.
6 My name is Audu, Audu Kadery [sp?] and I'm a
7 volunteer with African Communities Together and first
8 and foremost, I'm a community organizer and a public
9 [sic] advocate. I am originally from Nigeria and I
10 came to New York to seek asylum and I'm here to
11 testify to the importance of adding language like
12 French and Arabic to the already existing foreign
13 languages being in New York City.

14 I was one of the few people that were
15 opportune to be trained as a translator under the
16 language access under the... NY Satisfy [sic] program;
17 that's New York Office of Mayor Immigrant Affairs --
18 sorry I mess that up. It was very important training
19 that gives us the skill and ability to be able to
20 translate professionally, and we've seen a lot of,
21 you know, the benefits of being trained and be able
22 to provide the services for those immigrants, asylum-
23 seeking refugees who come to this country to seek a
24 better life. You know, there is no way they can
25 access services if they are not able to express

1 themselves and get access to the services that they
2 need. I've been opportune to assist some people in
3 translating and I've been able to act [sic] as a
4 witness in our meetings; because we are trained,
5 we're able to provide the services in our meetings,
6 when we have to translate to French speakers,
7 **[inaudible]**, African, you know, language speakers.
8 So for me I think it's very important to include
9 these languages because it will... [bell] it will
10 afford African immigrants who come to New York to be
11 able to access services and navigate their way and
12 ensuring proper assimilation into society. Thank
13 you.

14
15 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you.

16 ABER KAWAS: **[inaudible]**

17 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Absolutely.

18 ABER KAWAS: Okay, I'm sorry; I have
19 another **[inaudible]**.

20 [laughter]

21 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you for your
22 time.

23 CATHERINE BARNETT: Good afternoon. My
24 name is Catherine Barnett and I'm the Executive
25 Director of the Restaurant Opportunities Center of

1
2 New York (ROC-NY). I wanna thank the Committee on
3 Governmental Operations for giving me the opportunity
4 to testify today.

5 ROC-NY, for the past 15 years, has been
6 working to improve wages and working conditions in
7 the restaurant industry and the restaurant industry
8 is one of the faster growing industries in the city;
9 it's one of the largest employers in the city as a
10 sector, and it has a very large amount of immigrant
11 workers in our industry. We have over 40% in the
12 industry who are not American born and that dovetails
13 with the amount of people that we know have -- in the
14 most recent census survey, 49% of New Yorkers speak a
15 language other than English at home. So we know that
16 in the restaurant industry it's very important for
17 the workforce to be able to not only know how to do
18 their job properly, but also to know their rights and
19 make sure that they know that they're not being
20 exploited or being taken advantage of and that they
21 have access to resources and services to be able to
22 live their dream of economic success and prosperity,
23 just as all of us want to do.

24 So we know also that in terms of the top
25 languages, in terms of restaurant workers, in

1 addition to Spanish and Chinese, we know that Arabic,
2 Urdu and Bengali, French is also in there, you know
3 some of the top languages of restaurant workers here
4 in the city, so we really want to make sure that
5 language access improves to include French, Arabic as
6 well as other African and Asian languages -- I might
7 mention Bengali and Urdu specifically, and we applaud
8 the City for what they've done as a sanctuary city
9 and providing language access, but we definitely can
10 and should do more. Thank you. [bell]

12 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you.

13 PETER GEE: Hi everyone, my name is Peter
14 Gee; I work at The Door and I'm really honored to be
15 here in front of you all and to be in a room with all
16 of our friends and **[inaudible]** immigrant rights
17 movement.

18 For over 40 years The Door has served as
19 an invaluable resource for New York City's youth,
20 including those facing homelessness, unemployment,
21 poverty, and deportation. Our mission remains to
22 empower young people to reach their full potential by
23 providing comprehensive youth services in a diverse
24 and caring environment. We serve over 10,000 young
25 people in New York City every year.

2 Every year The Door provides immigration
3 advice and representation to over 1,500 young people
4 across New York City and we serve hundreds more
5 through workshops, referrals and technical support.
6 Our clients come from all over the world, including
7 Central America, China, West Africa, the Caribbean,
8 and South America. From Sunset Park, Brooklyn to
9 Highbridge in the Bronx, The Door is one of the go-to
10 agencies for low-income youth in search of
11 immigration assistance.

12 I just wanna say that we're fully
13 supportive with all of our colleagues in terms of
14 talking about the inclusion of more languages for New
15 York City. Just so you know, the top languages that
16 we serve for young people at The Door, in addition to
17 Spanish and Chinese, French, Urdu, Bengali, and
18 Arabic are the other top dialects and languages that
19 young people come to The Door seeking services, so
20 the inclusion of additional languages is something
21 that The Door is fully supportive and we hope that
22 the City makes that effort.

23 We know that Executive Order 120 has been
24 trailblazing in many ways, but you know we are fully
25 also supportive of this bill, just because that we

1 know, like you've heard from many of our colleagues,
2 the reality in terms of frontline New York City
3 staff, really living and executing the spirit of the
4 bill has not always been so great and so we do
5 believe that this bill will help create a greater
6 accountability system and also provide an ability for
7 young people in New York City to provide feedback to
8 New York City directly [bell] about some of the
9 services and language access that it receives.
10

11 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you. We are
12 definitely open to that feedback. Thank you very
13 much.

14 This is our last call to fill out one of
15 these appearance cards; we have our final panel
16 coming up. Okay, not seeing anyone running for
17 these. Next one is Sami D from Black Alliance for
18 Just Immigration; M for ACT, and M. Barro [sp?] for
19 ACT. [background comments] And we have one more
20 person coming, which we'll wait for; they'll just
21 fill out their card and we'll run it up the front.
22 Make sure to hand it to the sergeant at arms; they
23 prefer we do it that way. Just hold on one moment.
24 How do I... How should I... [interpose, background
25 comment] Amaha and the last name starts with...

1 [background comment] got it, Kassa from ACT. This is
2 our final panel. Thank you very much all of you who
3 joined us for the past two hours and thank you all
4 for your patience. You are free to begin.

5
6 SAMI DISU: Yes. Good afternoon, Chair
7 Kallos. My name is Sami Disu, Communications Manager
8 for Black Alliance for Just Immigration. What we are
9 is a racial justice and migrant rights organization
10 that engages in education, advocacy in order to fight
11 the rampant mass criminalization that has been
12 targeting both African American and other black
13 immigrant communities.

14 I just wanted to add to some of what my
15 colleagues have been talking about, particularly when
16 it comes to criminalization of black communities,
17 which has a multiplied, negative effect on black
18 immigrants. As you know, in this country we have a
19 criminal justice system that targets minorities,
20 particularly African American people of color. These
21 people that end up in the criminal justice system
22 serve their time, but for black immigrants there is
23 the additional cost of being deported after serving
24 their time at the expense of taxpayers. We've been
25 engaging in a number of forums at this time of

1 political uncertainty and we had a town hall just
2 yesterday where a lot of our audience were expressing
3 concern about what's gonna happen in a climate where
4 we are already criminalized and now looking to an
5 administration coming in that's probably going to
6 worse the situation. So I just wanted to really
7 stress that we need increased access to language,
8 because sooner or later, as we are anticipating, our
9 communities are going to want to engage with all
10 kinds of city services in order to better [bell]
11 insulate themselves from what we see as a very
12 inhospitable administration that's about to take
13 place. Thank you very much.

14
15 FALCOM BAI: Good afternoon. Thank you
16 for having us here. My name is Falcom Bai [sp?] and
17 I'm here representing the African Communities
18 Together, but also I work as a healthcare manager
19 [sic] in the South Bronx, in a hospital called Bronx-
20 Lebanon Hospital, so I deal a lot with a huge African
21 community that's in the Bronx, and I'll just give an
22 example of that.

23 I have this lady that I know for a while
24 now; she was trying pretty much to enroll in health
25 coverage for her and her four kids because she's a

1 single mom; it was really frustrating for her, to the
2 point that she wanted to give up and take the
3 penalty, like it was how frustrating that was,
4 because even though she **[inaudible]** yet, she's not
5 fluent in French; she speaks Wolof. So I would
6 emphasize on that; not only we need the French;
7 Arabic, but also we need things like Soninke, Twi and
8 others, because you know there's a huge community
9 that speaks those languages as their first language.

11 Just today, when I was here waiting in
12 the lobby, she gave me a call because she went to get
13 her result from the doctor and the thing is, since
14 she's only fluent in Wolof, she couldn't understand
15 very well, so she called me and I told her that I'm
16 out for the rest of the day because I'm here and she
17 stressed how stressful it is for her like to be
18 waiting for the result and that I cannot be there
19 today, nor tomorrow, because she's working tomorrow,
20 so she has now till Monday to just [bell] get the
21 result, and she couldn't afford to have her child
22 with her with like telling her what's going on. So
23 that's just how frustrating it is sometimes for these
24 people. Thank you very much.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Sorry for your
3 mother and thank you for being here despite the cost
4 to your family and thank you for your service to your
5 family as a caretaker; it is something that we
6 actually passed legislation to protect caretakers
7 from discrimination.

8 MALADOU: Good afternoon. My name is
9 Maladou [sp?]; I'm a community health worker and
10 **[inaudible]**; I'm here to talk about the school
11 system. Many Africans, they don't speak English;
12 they are not educated back home, but they do speak
13 French, and they can't communicate with their kids'
14 teacher to understand what is going on with the kids.
15 I know some kids who have been left out because their
16 parent doesn't show up for parent-teacher conference
17 or anything for the school and **[inaudible]** why you
18 never show up for your kids, because, they say, "Oh,
19 every time I go for my kids, they ignore me as I'm
20 nonexistent." So for that situation they choose to
21 not go to the school and those kids have been left
22 out, and as a community health worker too, I witness
23 many case in Harlem Hospital when mothers been
24 completely neglect by the front desk nurse because
25 they don't speak English. I witnessed and I went and

1 asked, "Can I help?" Then I translate for those
2 moms, but the front, they ignored them completely
3 because they don't speak English. One time I even
4 got into a fight with one of the [inaudible], but at
5 least get them some translate [inaudible]. But they
6 have to speak English. I said no, they don't have
7 to. They have to... they can learn English, but for
8 the time being you're supposed to give them some
9 interpretation. So if the system can consider
10 French, at least French, [inaudible] system,
11 especially in school and health care [inaudible], it
12 would be a big [inaudible] community. Thanks.

14 AMAHA KASSA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman;
15 honorable Council Members, and I wanna thank all the
16 beautiful and brilliant members of African
17 Communities Together for saying most of what needed
18 to be said. My name is Amaha Kassa; I'm the
19 Executive Director of African Communities Together
20 and I'm just gonna follow up with a few key
21 statistics and also some specific policy
22 recommendations, which I'll also share in the written
23 testimony.

24 So as you've heard from our members, our
25 community, African immigrants, is large and growing;

1 official estimates by the City are that there are
2 130,000 African-born New Yorkers. Just to put that
3 in perspective, let's compare it to some of New
4 York's other well-known immigrant communities; about
5 76,000 Russians, 73,000 Koreans, 73,000 Indians, and
6 94,000 Haitians, and Executive Order 120 includes
7 among its top six LEP languages Russian, Korean,
8 Bengali, and Haitian-Creole, as it should; however,
9 it does not include French, the most widely shared
10 language of African New Yorkers after English, it
11 does not include Arabic and it does not include any
12 of the indigenous languages of Africa; in effect, the
13 entire continent of Africa, as well as the Mideast
14 region, have been left out of the current LEP policy.

16 We commend the Council for moving to
17 codify the language access policy; as the recent
18 federal election has demonstrated, Executive Orders
19 are only as good as the next executive to hold the
20 job, but we urge the Council to improve on the
21 Executive Order as well by increasing the number of
22 LEP languages from six to at minimum eight and
23 looking closely also at the methodology used to
24 measure the top LEP languages. As Chairman Kallos
25 pointed out, many member of our community speak

1 languages like Wolof, Fulani, Kru, or Mandingo at
2 home, but use French and Arabic for official
3 business, higher education and intergroup
4 communication.
5

6 In the testimony we'll share maps that
7 show how the number of likely French speakers [bell]
8 is significantly larger than official estimates.
9 I'll conclude, but one... [interpose]

10 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: You can finish your
11 own testimony... [crosstalk]

12 AMAHA KASSA: Okay, great.

13 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: you've done a great
14 job at getting folks from the community out here;
15 democracy only works when we actually hear from
16 folks, so please take the time you need. Thank you...
17 [crosstalk]

18 AMAHA KASSA: Thank you. Thank you very
19 much, Mr. Chair.

20 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: we saved the best
21 for last.

22 [laughter]

23 AMAHA KASSA: Our members are the best.
24 But a number of City agencies have already recognized
25 the growing service populations of French and Arabic

1
2 speakers and adopted French, Arabic or both as
3 priority languages for their agency, including ACS,
4 Department of Education, Health and Hospitals,
5 Department of Homeless Services, which includes
6 French, HRA, which includes Arabic, and DYCD, which
7 includes Arabic.

8 In addition to kind of large populations
9 and fairness, I would also note that these
10 populations are newer and so they're more likely to
11 use city services more intensively. That's why we
12 recommend that the City not use, in determining the
13 top six languages, a simple census head count, which
14 is what the draft introduction proposes, but in fact
15 use the same five-factor test, which it directs
16 agencies to use to determine the top city languages,
17 and that top five-factor test includes things like
18 the number of LEP speakers but also the frequency of
19 contact, the importance of city services, agency
20 resources, and maybe most importantly, data from
21 language use surveys.

22 The last point is that we also support
23 the increased use of indigenous African languages,
24 like Wolof, Fulani; Kru, as well as, you know, some
25 of the Asian languages that our brothers and sisters

1
2 have supported. We recognize some of these may never
3 rise to being the top LEP languages for the entire
4 city, but we think that at the level of specific
5 neighborhoods, like the Bronx District 9 schools or
6 Harlem Hospital or African merchants in Bed-Stuy and
7 Crown Heights, that targeted African language
8 expansions could be achieved by language access
9 surveys and language access plans as the draft
10 legislation proposes. What we would say there is
11 it's very important to partner with community
12 organizations like ours, like Asian American
13 Federation; like Arab American Alliance to ensure
14 that those surveys get to people who need the
15 services and who qualify for the services; not just
16 the ones who are already coming in for the services,
17 because as you've heard, some people are discouraged
18 from even seeking services by language barriers.

19 So those are our recommendations, that we
20 increase the number of top languages from six to at
21 least eight to include French and Arabic, to use the
22 five-factor test, and to support increased use of
23 indigenous African languages through community
24 partnerships on language use surveys.

1 I just wanna finally say thank you,
2 merci, shukran and I ni che.

3 [background comment, laughter, clapping]

4 CHAIRPERSON KALLOS: Thank you all for
5 participating and joining us today; again, if you
6 haven't had a chance to make your voice heard, in
7 whichever language you wish, please feel free to
8 submit additional testimony to BKallos@BenKallos.com.
9 If you wish to participate over social media, that's
10 also @BenKallos and again, apologies for folks, I've
11 been corrected; there were folks who were asked to
12 wait downstairs until we had a room available; those
13 folks apparently were asked to come upstairs to an
14 overflow room and then once we had room we brought
15 them in, but again, we'll endeavor to do better. And
16 just I think the concerns that have been brought up
17 by many of the panelists are real and whether it's
18 with the NYPD or in interacting with health care or
19 you've named the instance; making sure our city is
20 language accessible to every New Yorker, both
21 residents and visitors alike is incredibly important,
22 and then just a key reminder that this is a sanctuary
23 city; it will continue to be a sanctuary city and the
24 Statue of Liberty and our City Council welcomes
25

2 everyone here; this is a city for all people, as it
3 was for my grandparents when they emigrated, and my
4 wife when she emigrated. So thank you and without
5 anyone else who wishes to speak, I hereby adjourn
6 this hearing of the Committee on Governmental
7 Operations.

8 [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 November 23, 2016