

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

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CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY
WITH THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL
OPERATIONS

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November 23, 2020
Start: 1:08 p.m.
Recess: 4:09 p.m.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING

B E F O R E: Carlos Menchaca,
Chairperson for Committee on
Immigration

Fernando Cabrera,
Chairperson for Committee on
Governmental Affairs

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

- Margaret S. Chin
- Daniel Dromm
- Mathieu Eugene
- Francisco P. Moya
- Ben Kallos
- Alan Maisel
- Ydanis Rodriguez
- Bill Perkins
- Keith Power
- Kalman Yeger

A P P E A R A N C E S

Ravi Reddi

Associate Director for Advocacy and Policy at the
Asian American Federation

Aracelis Lucero

Executive Director of Masa

Robert Agyemang

New York Director of African Communities Together

Theodore Moore

Director of Local Policy and Legislation at the
New York Immigration Coalition

Bitta Mostofi

Commissioner of Mayor's Office of Immigrant
Affairs

Steven Ettannani

Executive Director of External Affairs at DCWP

Anne Montesano

Executive Director of Interagency Initiatives and
Language Access at MOIA

Jeehae Fischer

Executive Director of the Korean American Family
Service Center

Ramatu Ahmed

Founder of the African Life Center

Alexandra Lee

Board Director at OCA New York

Hallie Yee

Policy Coordinator at the Coalition for Asian
American Children and Families

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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Angelica Lara
Education and Outreach Director of UnLocal

Ana Guilcatanda
Staff Attorney in the Family and Immigration Unit
in Legal Services New York City

Mezeda Uddin
Co-Founder of the South Asian Fund for the
Education Scholarship and Training

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH
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SERGEANT DAUTAJ: Cloud recording started.

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SERGEANT HOPE: Thank you.

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SERGEANT PEREZ: Backup is rolling.

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SERGEANT HOPE: Thank you. Sergeant Polite, you may begin with your opening statement.

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SERGEANT POLITE: Thank you. Good afternoon and welcome to the Remote Hearing on Immigration jointly with the Committee on Governmental Operations. Will Council Members and staff please turn on their videos at this time. Once again, will Council Members and staff please turn on their video at this time. Thank you.

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To minimize disruptions please place all cellphones, electronics to vibrate. You may send your testimony at testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again, that's testimony@council.nyc.gov. Chair, we are ready to begin.

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CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Sergeant Polite and Buenos Dias everyone. We are going to have a really important and timely hearing.

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[GAVEL] I call this hearing to order and I would like to introduce myself to you. My name is Carlos Menchaca and I am the Chair of the New York City's Council Committee on Immigration. Today, the

1
2 Committee on Immigration is joined by the Committee
3 on Governmental Operations and my colleague Chair
4 Fernando Cabrera and I will conduct this Oversight on
5 the City's Language Access and Emergency
6 Preparedness. I would like to recognize member of
7 the Council that are here with us today. Council
8 Member Dromm, Kallos, Maisel, Perkins, Powers and
9 Yeger.

10 In the City that never sleeps, New Yorkers speak
11 over 200 different languages. While one in four New
12 Yorkers is limited English proficient or LEP. The
13 Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs reports that
14 close to half of all immigrant New Yorkers are LEP.

15 The ability to communicate in English can be an
16 enormous barrier for LEP communities when it comes to
17 accessing critical city services and information.
18 Recognizing this, in 2017 the Council sought to
19 ensure that the City spoke the languages of its
20 residents. Local Law 30 of 2017 required that the
21 City provide language assistance for speakers of the
22 top ten citywide designated languages. According to
23 the Mayor's Office, that list encompasses Spanish,
24 Chinese, Russian, Haitian Creole, Korean and a newly
25 added Arabic Urdu, French and Polish. And in their

1
2 most recent annual report, MOIA states that 85
3 percent of all LEP New Yorkers speak one of those ten
4 languages.

5 In 2018, the Committee held a hearing to review
6 the City's compliance with Local Law 30.
7 Specifically taking a deep dive into the City agency
8 language access plans. Which should clearly set out
9 an agency language access in priorities. Two years
10 later and only a handful of agencies have made the
11 changes to their language access plans that we
12 highlighted at that hearing. Moreover, most agencies
13 have not reported on their annual language access
14 efforts and many have not published updated plans
15 since 2018.

16 I expect to hear commitments today from the
17 Administration that these reports and updated plans
18 will not be delayed further. Today, the City is in
19 the midst of a second wave of COVID-19 cases. A
20 pandemic of such unimaginable scale just a year ago.
21 One of the ways the Language Access Law anticipated
22 2020 was that it required that all agencies include
23 emergency preparedness sections in their language
24 access plans.

1
2 The New York City that we know is no stranger to
3 disaster and the architects of this legislation
4 wanted to ensure that when a disaster came, the city
5 was prepared to communicate with and support all its
6 residents. Not only those who could read, write and
7 speak English.

8 Today, the Committee's will be taking a deep dive
9 yet again. This time focusing on the emergency
10 preparedness that COVID-19 responsive city agencies
11 included in their mandated language access plans and
12 who the city managed their mandate of proper and
13 timely language access during the pandemic.

14 As we begin this hearing, I would like us to
15 imagine what it feels like to be an LEP New Yorker.
16 Perhaps an immigrant LEP New Yorker or an
17 undocumented LEP New Yorker. Imagine being the
18 parent of a child who is expected to engage in
19 virtual learning when your child's school has offered
20 no support for your language. How to navigate that.
21 How to engage. Who do you ask for questions?

22 Imagine receiving delayed mixed messages from
23 your government about avoiding medical services so
24 that you can stay home even though you should be
25 seeking medical help. Imagine the trauma and the

1
2 frustration of losing family members to COVID-19 and
3 not being able to make a burial plan for your loved
4 ones because you could not communicate with privately
5 run funeral homes. Imagine trying to navigate
6 various government agencies regarding sending the
7 body of a loved one to their nation of origin as a
8 non-English speaker.

9 Imagine being gravely ill with COVID-19 and being
10 unable to communicate with healthcare workers trying
11 their best to provide you healthcare in an
12 overburdened system that does not adequately provide
13 language access. Just last week, the NYCEM sent out
14 notifications about school closures in Spanish,
15 stating that the schools would be closed, [SPEAKING
16 IN SPANISH 5:54-5:58]. This is unacceptable.

17 The City should not have done this and they need
18 to do better. The City must do better and linguistic
19 diversity is not new to the City and this pandemic
20 has only highlighted all the ways in which the City
21 should be doing better in speaking to its residents,
22 communicating to its residents in their language.

23 I want to thank Chair Cabrera again as well as
24 the Committee on Governmental Operations for joining
25 us in our hearing today, as well as all the staff

1
2 behind the scenes making this hearing run smoothly
3 and ensuring that we are all prepared for this
4 conversation.

5 I would like to thank Immigration Committee Staff
6 for their hard work on this issue, Committee Counsel
7 Harbani Ahuja, Policy Analyst Elizabeth Kronk,
8 Government Operations Committee Staff will be thanked
9 by our Chair and with that, I want to turn it over to
10 Co-Chair Cabrera. Chair Cabrera, are you ready?

11 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you so much, good
12 afternoon. Thank you to my Co-Chair Council Member
13 Carlos Menchaca for inviting my Committee to join
14 today and your leadership on this important issue.
15 One that I know full well, though I was born right
16 here in the Bronx, my first language was Spanish. My
17 parents moved to Puerto Rico. I know the pressures,
18 I know the insecurities, the fears, especially what
19 young people go through and families.

20 And I want to thank the sponsor of the bills we
21 will hearing today. Council Member Cornegy Jr. for
22 joining us today and for your leadership on this
23 issue.

24 I am Council Member Fernando Cabrera, as was
25 stated Chair of the Committee on Governmental

1
2 Operations. Today, we are holding our second
3 oversight hearing on the City's Landmark Language
4 Access Law, Local Law 30 of 2017. During the
5 Bloomberg Administration there was an Executive Order
6 on language access that required agencies to provide
7 public services in six languages. Local Law 30
8 codified and expanded upon that order. We increased
9 the number of language to ten, mandated certain good
10 practices and require regular outreach to language
11 communities outside the ten designated languages.
12 Every cover agencies require to develop a language
13 access implementation plan and report on their
14 progress annually.

15 We conducted our first oversight hearing on those
16 plans back in October 2018. We were happy to see
17 that a good level of compliance with our law but also
18 found a lot of room for improvement. Today, we are
19 focusing on our second review of agencies plans on
20 how they provide language access in times of
21 emergency. Just like we have just experienced during
22 the COVID-19 pandemic. You heard it from Council
23 Member Menchaca and I will say it again, ensuring
24 language access in all ten city language, especially
25 during times of emergency must be a number one

1
2 priority of city agency. Staying informed on quicky
3 changing public health rules and guidance is
4 literally a matter of life and death for New Yorkers
5 today.

6 Knowing how to keep assessing city services as
7 agencies adjust to remote work is a matter of life
8 and death and those who rely upon it in their daily
9 lives. We must ensure that our immigrant neighbors
10 and those that are in-proficient in English have
11 equal access to information and services in their
12 language.

13 I want to thank the Mayor's Office of Immigrant
14 Affairs and the Mayor's Office of Operations for
15 their continued work to ensure agencies comply with
16 Local Law 30. We are committed to working together
17 to reach a successful implementation of this law by
18 every cover agency.

19 We are also hearing two bills today. The first,
20 Introduction 63, sponsored by Council Member Cornegy
21 Jr. will require the Department of Consumers and
22 Workers Protection and Health and Mental Hygiene to
23 provide written communications regarding inspection
24 results in the business owners language of choice.
25

1
2 Council Member Cornegy is here today and will speak
3 more on his bill.

4 We are also hearing Introduction 1868 sponsored
5 by Council Member Torres. This bill will establish
6 an office of Puerto Rico New York City Affairs with a
7 director appointed by the Mayor. The office will be
8 empowered to provide assistance to former residents
9 of Puerto Rico and descendants of Puerto Rico,
10 residents including addressing the needs of people
11 displaced from Puerto Rico, assist any obtaining
12 vital documents from Puerto Rico, assisting the
13 understanding and applying for government programs,
14 making referrals to nonprofits and providing any
15 other services the director deems necessary to
16 provide.

17 The director will need to make reasonable efforts
18 to work with the Governor of Puerto Rico to provide
19 these services. Thank you to my colleagues joining
20 here today at today's hearing and many other staffs
21 working behind the scenes to ensure this remote
22 hearing runs smoothly. I want to also thank my
23 Committee staff; I call them the dream team for their
24 work on this issue. Committee Counsel CJ Murray,
25 Senior Policy Analyst Emily Forgione and Elizabeth

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2 Kronk, Senior Finance Analyst Sebastian Bacchi and my
3 Communication Legislative Director Claire McLeveighn
4 and I will now turn it back to the Moderator.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank you
6 Chair and we are not yet joined by Council Member
7 Cornegy or Torres, so we will wait for them to join
8 and give them the opportunity to speak on those
9 bills. But at this point, let's hand it over to our
10 Moderator Harbani Ahuja.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. My name is
12 Harbani Ahuja and I am Counsel to the Committee on
13 Immigration at the New York City Council.

14 Before we begin, I want to remind everyone that
15 you will be on mute until you are called on to
16 testify, when you will unmuted by the host. I will
17 be calling on panelists to testify. Please listen
18 for your name to be called. I will be periodically
19 announcing who the next panelist will be.

20 For everyone testifying today, please note that
21 there may be a few seconds of delay before you are
22 unmuted and we thank you in advance for your
23 patience. All hearing participants should submit
24 testimony, written testimony to

25 testimony@council.nyc.gov. At today's hearing the

1
2 first panel will be an advocate panel followed by the
3 Administration, followed by Council Member questions
4 and then the public will testify. During the
5 hearing, if Council Members would like to ask a
6 question, please use the Zoom raised hand function
7 and I will call on you in order.

8 I would like to note that Council Member Moya has
9 joined for the record and we will now turn to testify
10 from our first panel. I would like to welcome Ravi
11 Reddi to testify. After Ravi, we will be hearing
12 from Aracelis Lucero, Robert Agyemang and then Theo
13 Moore. Ravi Reddi, you may begin when you are ready.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

15 RAVI REDDI: I want to thank the Committee Chair
16 Menchaca, Committee Chair Cabrera and the Immigration
17 and Governmental Operations Committee's for holding
18 this hearing and giving the Asian American Federation
19 the opportunity to testify today.

20 I am Ravi Reddi and I am the Associate Director
21 for Advocacy and Policy at the Asian American
22 Federation. AAF represents the collective voice of
23 more than 70 member nonprofits serving 1.3 million
24 Asian New Yorkers.

1
2 So, for some context, this pandemic has resulted
3 in a 35 percent increase in deaths compared to the
4 five-year average. Our small business have been hit
5 earlier and harder than the general economy and
6 rising anti-Asian xenophobia and violence is further
7 isolating our most vulnerable out of fear for their
8 safety.

9 Over 1.3 million Asians live in our City, 16
10 percent of our City's total population. Overall, 14
11 percent live in poverty, including one in four Asian
12 seniors. And almost half of our community have
13 limited English proficiency.

14 We want to thank these Committee's and the City
15 agencies who continue to do the hard work of acting
16 on persistent concerns of language access but we are
17 here because this work requires greater urgency. For
18 example, 88 percent of our Asian small business
19 owners are immigrants. But in this crisis, the lack
20 of timely translation is exacerbating inequities
21 between our small business owners and their English
22 speaking counterparts.

23 Many Asian small businesses continue to be unable
24 to apply for government assistance because in-

1
2 language assistance and instructions never
3 materialized or they came too late.

4 AAF has also heard reports from across the City
5 of a lack of engagement during city inspections
6 regarding what needs to be done if a small business
7 owner does not speak English, who are simply
8 forwarded to City websites. But City agency websites
9 are extremely difficult to navigate for LEP small
10 business owners in their own right and language
11 access issues are compounding difficulties our small
12 business are having in navigating complicated City
13 bureaucracies.

14 Language access is at its core an issue of
15 relationship building. And our seniors, our most
16 vulnerable population are coming to our community
17 service providers before they approach our city to
18 get their basic needs met because like most
19 immigrants, they will utilize services that reflect
20 their values and ethnic identities. Language access
21 is a function of cultural competence and in so many
22 ways our community based organizations are leveraging
23 the good will they have earned in our communities to
24 provide programming and conducting wellness checks in
25

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2 language hand and hand with culturally competent food
3 services and healthcare.

4 When it comes to language of limited diffusion,
5 like Nepali or Punjabi, telephonic translation, the
6 norm for mainstream and government service providers
7 has shown time after time that there are few
8 substitutes for in-person translation. This is where
9 our community based organizations shine,
10 demonstrating that they are best equipped to provide
11 local, accessible and culturally competent services
12 turning unreliable language access into meaningful
13 and equal access to services for the city's newest
14 residents.

15 New York's Pan Asian American community is made
16 up of more than 20 ethnic groups, diverse in
17 language, culture and religion and since 2017 AAF has
18 worked in coalition with African communities together
19 Masa and the New York Immigration Coalition to expand
20 the number of languages covered by city social
21 service agencies and this work continues.

22 SERGEANT AT ARM: Time.

23 RAVI REDDI: Now, I just have a couple
24 recommendations if it is okay. So, now we need city
25 agent initiatives to allocate the funding needed to

1
2 fully implement the new citywide languages covered by
3 Local Law 30 and we need to amend contracting
4 processes to allow Asian-led nonprofits to more
5 accurately reflect the cultural and language
6 expertise they bring when serving our community
7 members.

8 Many organizations we advocate on behalf of, also
9 must use their limited resources to find interpreters
10 and translators who are not always trained in
11 interpreting or translating legal, medical and other
12 sensitive terminology or devote staff hours to these
13 responsibilities. The City must provide better
14 funding and support for CBOs who are already familiar
15 with the matter, have community buy-in and are asked
16 to provide translations.

17 We also believe in the work we have been doing
18 over the past three years alongside our partners I
19 mentioned before to create a language bank to expand
20 translation services for as many immigrant
21 communities as possible and we ask the Council to
22 find ways to support this effort.

23 And finally, we think the City must consider
24 creating a mechanism for central uniform translation
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1
2 by City agencies. This is a question of access as
3 much as it is a question of capacity.

4 So, with that said, we look forward to working
5 with all of you and City agencies in this effort,
6 thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Can I interject really
8 quick here? Ravi, do we have your – does the Council
9 have your digital version of this testimony?

10 RAVI REDDI: I will be submitting a written
11 testimony immediately after this, yes.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay great, I want to get
13 those recommendations.

14 RAVI REDDI: Absolutely.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
16 I would like to now call on Aracelis Lucero. You may
17 begin when you are ready.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

19 ARACELIS LUCERO: Thank you, Buenos Dias. My
20 name is Aracelis Lucero, I am the Executive Director
21 of Masa. I would like to first start by
22 acknowledging Native American Heritage month and
23 also, honor the Lenape people as we stand on what was
24 once their home.

1
2 Tlazohcamati which means thank you in Nahuatl, an
3 indigenous language of Mexico for inviting me today
4 to share our testimony. Masa is a community based
5 organization that works with Mexican and Latin
6 American immigrant children youth and families in the
7 South Bronx to develop strong learners and leaders
8 who fully contribute to their community. We have a
9 community that integrated model that engages the
10 entire family and we are grounded in a deep
11 commitment to strengthening literacy, leadership and
12 power from Mexican, Central American indigenous
13 people.

14 The community in which Masa has worked for over
15 two decades is often considered hard to reach,
16 largely undocumented with 95 percent of the adults
17 being foreign borne. 40 percent of the parents have
18 less than a primary school education and about 85
19 have less than a secondary school education. About
20 30 percent of our community members speak an
21 indigenous language like Mixteco, Nahuatl, Tlapaneco,
22 Mam to name a few and the majority have an annual
23 income of \$30,000 or less for an average family of
24 four and a half. And I would like to know that that
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1
2 is data from before the pandemic. So, we know their
3 household income has dramatically decreased.

4 Many of our community members work in the food
5 service, cleaning, childcare and construction
6 industry. About 90 percent of the families, as soon
7 as the City went on pause, lost their income and
8 their jobs. And so, they currently are facing food,
9 housing, education and health insecurity.

10 A significant number of Masa community members,
11 especially amongst our indigenous speaking community
12 have limited digital literacy and limited literacy
13 skills which presents their own set of challenges as
14 we all seek to provide better support and service for
15 this community who were severely impacted by the
16 pandemic. This has to be something that is
17 considered as we discuss improving language access
18 for especially immigrant communities. Since not
19 everybody has the same level of access to digital
20 literacy or literacy overall. And of course we serve
21 a community that is mostly limited English
22 proficiency and I am just going to focus on two
23 particular areas that are really important to Masa.

24 Education, as Carlos Menchaca has already noted.
25 There was a lot of misinformation or a lack of

1
2 information flowing to families during the pandemic
3 who did not speak English. School-based
4 communications were coming to families without being
5 translated and often times, they were getting
6 translation of important documents, much later than
7 their English speaking counterparts. We have an
8 understanding that there is a TNI unit in the
9 Department of Education but they have stated that
10 they are really over stretched and tasked during this
11 time but that's simply like not okay, especially when
12 we are not communicating -

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

14 ARACELIS LUCERO: Health information and families
15 need to make important decisions. I will skip over
16 to the health. I just want to talk about one
17 instance that really impacted our organization and
18 this community member. His name is Aristo[SP?], he
19 was renting a room. He was afraid to go to the
20 emergency room. He was asked not to go by his
21 roommates who were also undocumented. He did not
22 know how to read and write, spoke Mixteco and when I
23 called the City, the local City hospital, I have a
24 good friend in the Community Affairs department who
25 said that they would support him; however, that if

1
2 they spoke an indigenous language it was best if they
3 brought somebody, especially if they did not know how
4 to read and write.

5 I think we need to do better. I am just going to
6 go quickly through my recommendations and I will
7 submit the testimony but we definitely would like to
8 advocate for the language bank and language worker
9 cooperatives especially for the Latin American
10 indigenous languages. Especially because there is
11 limited language and limited literacy and digital
12 literacy. We feel is critically important especially
13 for this group and all limited language diffusion
14 languages to have access to interpreters that are
15 trained and that are culturally responsive to their
16 communities.

17 We would like to propose to improve school-based
18 communications in central DOE capacity. There was a
19 plan that was submitted to the Department of
20 Education that was created by the New York
21 Immigration Education Collaborative that we would
22 like to strongly advocate for.

23 An increased number of health and mental health
24 professionals including counselors in schools that
25 speak Spanish and indigenous languages and who are

1
2 culturally fluent. Again, I think something that we
3 have heard a lot about today, language access goes
4 hand and hand with being able to reach and gain the
5 trust of community members. And then holding adult
6 initiatives that include digital literacy, adult
7 literacy and ESL classes for our community.

8 And by saying that the true testament of who we
9 are and our values are how we treat the most
10 vulnerable members of our society, and I look forward
11 to partnering with the City to make that happen. Th
12 Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
15 Next, we will be hearing from Robert Agyemang. You
16 may begin when you are ready.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

18 ROBERT AGYEMANG: Good afternoon everyone. Good
19 afternoon Chairman Menchaca and Chairman Cabrera. I
20 really appreciate the opportunity to speak to you
21 today about language access for African communities.
22 And my name is Robert Agyemang, I am the New York
23 Director of African Communities Together. African
24 Communities Together, also known as ACT or ACT is an
25 organization of African immigrants that empowers our

1
2 community members to integrate socially, advance
3 economically and engage civically.

4 I am representing our communities respectfully
5 who were not really communicated properly to during
6 this pandemic. And I want to emphasize that there
7 has to be a more strategic way of how we communicate
8 with the communities that are "hard to reach".

9 Most COVID information due to the nature of this
10 pandemic was rapid. It was instantaneous and it was
11 not in languages that was accessible to our
12 communities.

13 In response to this pandemic, ACT conducted a
14 survey to measure the impact of COVID-19 and all of
15 its impact in the African community. Between May and
16 July, early July, ACT was able to conduct a survey of
17 1,041 community members. The results of this survey
18 would give you an indication of how much work we
19 still need to do. With the question that we asked,
20 did you receive any information from the government
21 about the coronavirus, either health information or
22 resources like unemployment in your language?

23 55 percent said no and another 5 percent said
24 they were not sure. While from early July to late
25 August, we kept tracking this question but within a

1
2 different kind of survey. When we asked an
3 additional 435 community members, 90 percent said no
4 to this same question of whether or they received
5 information in their language.

6 If you combined those answers, just from that
7 short period of three months where the pandemic was
8 at its most ravaging, we are looking at over 65
9 percent of African communities were not able to
10 receive vital languages that were able to help them
11 or get them information on how to save their lives or
12 the lives of their loved ones.

13 Only 35 percent was able to get this information
14 and I want to also emphasize that of that 435,
15 between early July and late August -

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

17 ROBERT AGYEMANG: That were - I will just ask for
18 a little bit more time, just to make a couple more
19 points. I do apologize.

20 Of that 435, 90 percent said they did not receive
21 the information. Over 50 percent of those community
22 members spoke French. And so, while we do emphasize
23 French, there is still a long way to go with French
24 and then also some of the other languages that we
25 have.

1
2 On behalf of ACT and Masa and the New York
3 Immigration Coalition and the Asian American
4 Federation, I would like to also recommend and
5 continue to urge the Council to invest in the
6 creation of a community legal interpreter bank, which
7 recruits, trains and dispatches legal interpreters
8 who provide services free of cost to city funded
9 nonprofit legal providers and also the development of
10 language services, worker owned cooperatives which
11 are community-based, worker owned agencies that build
12 the pipeline of trained languages, service
13 professionals while creating skilled employment and
14 business opportunities for New York immigrant
15 communities.

16 I thank you for your time. I look forward to
17 working with all of you to create a greater New York.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Robert.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
20 Now, we will hear from Theo Moore. You may begin
21 when you are ready.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

23 THEO MOORE: Good afternoon, my name is Theodore
24 Moore, I am the Director of Local Policy and
25 Legislation at the New York Immigration Coalition an

1
2 umbrella policy and advocacy organization that works
3 statewide with over 200 immigrant serving member
4 organizations. Thank you Chair Menchaca, Chair
5 Cabrera and the members of the City Council Court
6 hearing and allowing me to testify.

7 On the topic of language access, New York City
8 took a really important step with the passage of
9 language access policy Local Law 30. However, the
10 significant barriers to language access for New
11 York's immigrant communities, particularly those that
12 speak languages of limited diffusion. And we saw and
13 are continuing to see the effects of those barriers
14 throughout this pandemic.

15 To build on the recent gains in this area, we
16 continue to propose that the Council support the
17 creation of community legal interpreter bank, modeled
18 after the one that has been used successfully since
19 2007 in DC to expand language access and increase the
20 supply of trained, vetted immigration legal
21 interpreters by committing funding through the City
22 Council budget to be provided to community-based
23 organizations.

24 To better serve LLD's, we are proposing that the
25 funding for the New York City Council's Worker

1
2 Cooperative Business Development Initiative be
3 increased to enable immigrant community-based
4 organizations to develop three and launch three
5 language service worker owned cooperatives. One for
6 African language, one for Asian languages and one for
7 indigenous Latinx American languages. The existence
8 of both declared and the cooperatives would have
9 allowed for an additional resource for individuals,
10 community organizations and even the City government
11 to rely on.

12 While I can't claim to have known that we were
13 going to endure a global pandemic this year, the New
14 York Immigration Coalition, Masa, Asian American
15 Federation and African communities together have been
16 trying to bring attention to these issues and
17 offering these very same solutions for over three
18 years now.

19 We hope this time our warning will be heeded and
20 our solutions will be implemented. Another issue
21 with Local Law 30 that has been made obvious
22 throughout this pandemic is that there is no
23 allowance for adjustment of documents that are
24 commonly distributed to the public that are
25 translated for emergency purposes and there is no

1
2 specificity on time table for when documents should
3 be translated. There may need to be amendments or
4 additions to Local Law 30 to mandate such adjustments
5 and dictate the timeliness necessary for emergency
6 situations.

7 And while we are focusing on solutions, we must
8 not forget about our immigrant adult learners. 2.2
9 million people in New York City, one out of every
10 three adults are either lacking a high school diploma
11 or have low English proficiency. In support of these
12 adult learners, we call on the City Council and the
13 Mayor –

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

15 THEO MOORE: In next years budget to vote to
16 restore all funding for adult literacy programs and
17 invest additional money over the next two years to
18 fund a pilot program that would provide wrap around
19 service to adult learners and will lead to greater
20 gains and a wider range of benefits for families and
21 communities.

22 Once again, thank you for convening this
23 extremely important hearing and allowing me to
24 testify. Myself, our entire organization and the 140
25 New York NYC members across New York City look

1
2 forward to continuing to work with all of you to come
3 up with solutions to ensure that everyone enjoys a
4 full and equal opportunity to recover from the threat
5 of this virus and the worst potential economic
6 downturn since the Great Depression. Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
8 At this time, I will see if any Council Members have
9 questions for this panel.

10 As a reminder, if you would like to ask a
11 question, please use the Zoom raise hand function and
12 I will call on you in order. Chair Menchaca?

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank you
14 Harbani and thank you to the panel for really laying
15 the foundation of work that has been in progress for
16 three years now. I guess my first question is, have
17 you sat down with the Administration, anyone at the
18 Administration and reviewed some of these ideas with
19 them?

20 We can pick any one of you, Theo or Robert.

21 THEO MOORE: Yeah and I feel like you were a part
22 of these meetings too. Last year and the year before
23 when we were going throughout the budget process, we
24 did meet with members of MOIA and they definitely
25 seemed to be attracted to you know like, interested

1
2 in both the language interpreter bank and the worker
3 cooperative more so I would say for the language
4 interpreter bank but we have had conversations and
5 will continue those conversations in hope of
6 implementing these policies.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Is there any sense of what
8 the hurdle is at the Mayor's Office on kind of
9 pushing this forward?

10 THEO MOORE: Aracelis?

11 ARACELIS LUCERO: I think overall and for many
12 people there is a question of feasibility and
13 scalability and also having a clear understanding of
14 how the services were. So, figuring out who has
15 access. What kind of you know, as a business, what
16 kind of income strategies you know, can be
17 implemented in order for this to be scalable.
18 Timeline and also, I think one thing that we have
19 been honest and I know for especially for Latin
20 American indigenous men, which is that different
21 communities might be in different starting points and
22 so, this will take some time.

23 But also, it is like understanding the DC model
24 and how it can be implemented. So, I think that it
25 is more of like the little nuances of how it would

1
2 actually be operationalized, that I think maybe some
3 of the questions that some people may have. And then
4 how to also you know, incorporate it into existing
5 initiatives. For example, the small business
6 initiatives. And so, I think those have been some of
7 the talking points.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank you for
9 that and I think as someone that's in City Council
10 and part of the budget negotiation team and Chair of
11 the Immigration Committee and part of the Adult
12 Literacy Coalition and just embedded in everything
13 that you all are doing; the Council is very aligned
14 with what you are talking about and I just want to
15 confirm that the Council has heard your voice. The
16 Council is thinking about pushing this and for us, I
17 think some of the hurdles have been about money. How
18 do we fund this? And the execution is a different
19 piece, that's where the Mayor's Office comes in
20 coordination with all of you but I think that's going
21 to be the question moving forward. This isn't a
22 budget hearing; this is a place for us to go and
23 review content and really understanding the impact to
24 a project like this but there is a lot of support in
25 the Council.

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2 Maybe my last question is about workforce and
3 having the workforce is kind of one piece that you
4 all spoke about. Really bringing people from the
5 community that understand that indigenous language
6 and just language and really connecting them to a
7 workforce opportunity, a job. Do you all think about
8 this as a jobs plan as well and can you talk a little
9 bit about what that looks like for you all and for
10 the City as we restart our economy.

11 ARACELIS LUCERO: I think I could go first.
12 Absolutely, I think that that has been one of the
13 greatest pushes for this as immigrant serving
14 organizations with our community members having very
15 limited options. Workforce opportunities for
16 employment, especially during this time. I think we
17 have seen an uptick in like street vending. A lot of
18 our community members are looking for opportunities
19 to get back on their feet and so, for me quite
20 frankly, it's like a non-brainer to be able to invest
21 in this community who have like showed up as delivery
22 workers, as construction workers, cleaning, taking
23 care of our kids. And so, being able to invest in
24 their development, there is not a lack of interest.
25 There is a lack of opportunities. And so, I think

1
2 that as a matter of business development and
3 investing in like our vulnerable communities and
4 especially limit of language diffusion communities is
5 really, really important. They have been like not
6 seen, not heard and excluded especially undocumented
7 people from the traditional like, opportunities to
8 get back on their feet. That's what I would have to
9 say.

10 THEO MOORE: Yeah, I would 100 percent agree.
11 You know, we not only see this as a solution to
12 language access issues but also as way to create jobs
13 and in entrepreneurship. So, each one of these
14 individuals in the cooperative are their own small
15 business and they are able, so the two things
16 actually work together. So, the members of the
17 cooperative are then able to have their services go
18 through the interpreter bank. So, it's actually
19 means to get them you know, to actually be able to
20 help along with their small businesses in the
21 cooperative that they are building and then I don't
22 have to explain to you, you know on the adult
23 literacy side, individuals who go through those
24 programs, especially individuals who don't have
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2 digital literacy, you know, how their earning
3 potential just rises.

4 So, these are really things you know as we are
5 seeing you know, record unemployment throughout the
6 city, especially in immigrant communities could
7 actually be a solution on the job front as well.

8 RAVI REDDI: Yeah, I just wanted to add in like,
9 this is in every way what community empowerment is
10 supposed to be. It's building an industry in the
11 community based on those individual community needs.
12 Now, I was mentioning how you know, a lot of them
13 have to work with the City or go through mainstream
14 organizations that you know stick with or have no
15 choice beyond telephonic translation.

16 So, you know, building these industries from the
17 inside out and expanding and not just making it such
18 that these - not just making it such that they just
19 work within their community but really giving these
20 an industrial base in some sense of the word.

21 And you know, I think, you know, the other
22 argument is that this idea actually makes more
23 efficient the expenditure of City dollars. Right
24 now, you are seeing a lot of nonprofits and a lot of
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1
2 agencies are actually spending a lot of money just
3 looking for translators.

4 So, in every sense of the word, this is really
5 helping you know, reinforce these communities that
6 have already been hit.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you for that. I
8 just wanted to lay that out that we already have a
9 lot of pieces of this. We have a robust adult
10 literacy program that survived a lot of the budget
11 cuts. We have a Worker Cooperative Initiative that's
12 funded by the Council to really ensure that work
13 cooperatives have what they need, legal assistance to
14 be able to grow. We just need the funding and the
15 leadership to really ensure that this happens
16 quickly. That we can move from pilot to full
17 implementation as quickly as possible and it sounds
18 like you are all ready to help make this happen.

19 So, we are going to hear from the Administration
20 next but before that, I want to make sure that if
21 there are any other members or Chair Cabrera, if you
22 had any questions.

23 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you so much Co-Chair.
24 I appreciate your questions. You pretty much asked
25 all the questions I had, except one and that is if

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you could share with us how taxing has this season been on your budget? Not the fact that – I am sure that you have an unprecedented amount of clients coming through, your nonprofits, dealing with translations. If you could just give us a brief panorama of what you are facing. And by the way, how sustainable that is and how long would you have the capacity based on the funding that you have right now?

RAVI REDDI: I think speaking from the perspective of advocating on behalf of 70 grassroots Asian American non-profits, what we are hearing from these organization that you know, we are all you know, between a rock and a hard place. You know, we are having our budgets cut but the demand isn't just level, it is actually expanding dramatically in specific constituencies, like our most vulnerable senior population, our small business. The need is increasing as the resources are decreasing in almost every service sector.

So, you know, I think universally, we all have been holding our breath for quite some time to see how you know, budgets will shape up but we know the

1
2 direction it is going in right now. I can just speak
3 for us though.

4 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you.

5 THEO MOORE: Yeah and I think the same for us and
6 our member organizations. I think we have been
7 fortunate to provide direct cash assistance to
8 individuals and organizations, mostly through
9 philanthropy that has provided money specifically to
10 the undocumented community.

11 But this is where you know, we looked for the
12 City to actually step in because it is really not the
13 job of community organizations and nonprofit
14 organizations to hold and bolster up communities in
15 times like this. We just don't have the capacity and
16 we have had to switch all of the work that we have
17 been doing over to direct aids. You know, whether it
18 is you know, in-person or hosting Facebook lives.
19 You know, just using any means that we can to get
20 both the word out and get assistance to the
21 communities all across the city but we really, we
22 really, really need the City to step up in so many
23 ways and language access is one of the ways but
24 obviously direct aid is another way and then just
25 really making sure that particularly the hardest hit

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2 communities, which happen to be immigrant communities
3 are served and are restored.

4 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you so much.

5 ARACELIS LUCERO: I would just end really quickly
6 that it is not sustainable to keep on doing this for
7 a long time. We have been doing diapers I think, we
8 have been doing food, we have been doing cash
9 assistance, the rent - I didn't talk about the rent
10 application.

11 People are left to do that on their own, the
12 state rent application and we have been open since
13 April. Again, our staff taking some risks but in
14 order to serve as we are speaking about like the most
15 vulnerable community members who mainly don't know
16 how to read or write or speak these indigenous
17 languages, there is no other option but to be able to
18 serve them sometimes in-person. And so, it is
19 definitely not sustainable and that's why I think
20 that we are looking for ways to be able to have the
21 city learn these ways of doing things with our
22 community members because we are a small
23 organization. And so, like many organizations,
24 grassroots organizations have stepped in but like
25 Theo said, we are looking forward to the City you

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2 know, learning this and being able to implement it
3 systemically and to citywide agencies.

4 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you so much. Let me
5 give it back to the Chair, my Co-Chair.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Chair Cabrera
7 and we can go back to the Moderator Harbani if there
8 is any other questions otherwise, we can head over to
9 the Administration and thank you again to this panel
10 to open this discussion and really we are going to
11 want some action. So we will hear about that from
12 the Admin.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. At this
14 time, there are no other questions. So, I would like
15 to thank this panel for your testimony and now we
16 will be moving on to Administration testimony.

17 I will be now calling on members of the
18 Administration to testify. Testimony will be
19 provided by the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs
20 Commissioner Bitta Mostofi and Executive Director of
21 External Affairs at DCWP Steven Ettannani.

22 Additionally, the following representatives will be
23 available for answering questions. Anne Montesano
24 Executive Director of Interagency Initiatives and
25 Language Access at MOIA.

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Before we begin, I will administer the oath.
Commissioner Mostofi, Executive Director Steve
Ettannani and Executive Director Anne Montesano, I
will call on you each individually for a response,
please raise your right hands.

Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth
and nothing but the truth in your testimony before
this Committee and to respond honestly to Council
Member questions? Commissioner Mostofi?

BITTA MOSTOFI: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Executive
Director Steve Ettannani?

STEVE ETTANNANI: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Executive
Director Anne Montesano?

ANNE MONTESANO: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Commissioner
Mostofi, you may begin when you are ready.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

BITTA MOSTOFI: Thank you. Good afternoon.
Thank you to Chair Menchaca, Chair Cabrera and the
members of the Committees on Immigration and
Governmental Operations for calling this hearing

1
2 today. I am Bitta Mostofi, I am the Commissioner of
3 the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

4 Language access poses a distinct challenge in New
5 York City, which is one of the most linguistically
6 diverse places in the world, with more than 200
7 languages spoken. About a quarter of the City has
8 limited English proficiency, meaning that these
9 individuals are more likely to have challenges
10 accessing English materials or receiving information
11 in the English language. City government bears the
12 responsibility of ensuring that those New Yorkers
13 with LEP have the opportunity and ability to engage
14 with the services and programs that they need, both
15 during normal times and amid a crisis.

16 MOIA has worked to make a concerted effort in
17 collaboration with the City agencies to improve
18 language access, especially after the passage of
19 Local Law 30, by working with them to build the
20 City's language access infrastructure and expand the
21 availability of language access services. We have
22 helped agencies develop their language access
23 implementation plans, designated language access to
24 coordinators at every agency that's under Local Law
25 30 and procure contracts with professional language

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2 services in order to ensure that they can administer
3 these services for the public. As well as
4 incorporate guidance and best practices and provide
5 technical assistance.

6 Owing to this groundwork MOIA has helped lay over
7 the past few years, the City was able to promptly
8 adapt its operation to respond a rapid increase of
9 the demand for language services during the COVID-19
10 pandemic. Let me be clear, the pandemic exposed
11 continuing challenges around language access, which
12 we take very seriously. But it is the City's work
13 over the past few years in implementing Local Law 30
14 that did allowed us to begin to address those
15 challenges in a more swift and effective way.

16 We continue to assess both the best practices and
17 the gaps in services that were identified during
18 recent months as we work towards greater language
19 justice for all New Yorkers. And we look forward to
20 discussing this with members of the Council today and
21 listening to advocates testimony.

22 My testimony will be brief in discussing the ways
23 in which we worked with City agencies to implement
24 Local Law 30 and how we addressed language access
25 needs during the pandemic.

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2 After Local Law 30 was passed in 2017, we worked
3 with the Mayor's Office of Operations to provide
4 guidance and oversight to the City agency partners in
5 developing, as I noted the plans and the
6 infrastructure that they need to implement them.
7 This has included educating agencies on the law's
8 requirements, ensuring the agencies have in place the
9 requisite staff and training that staff and helping
10 to develop individualized plans to implement along
11 with as I noted, the contracts needed to so.

12 Ongoing work with agencies has focused on
13 bolstering their capacity to provide language access
14 by developing shared resources and best practices to
15 learn from each other and to continue for our office
16 to provide technical assistance. To support these
17 efforts, we have created an online portal for all
18 agencies to share language access resources or
19 materials to provide trainings that can be used for
20 staff or the onboarding of new staff, procedures or
21 best practices for things like website accessibility
22 and tools for staff to improve how they can
23 communicate with and serve New Yorkers with LEP.

24 We have also convened language access
25 coordinators at least twice a year to address topics

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2 such as how to work more effectively with vendors,
3 how to incorporate interpretation best practices, how
4 to develop language access procedures, and how to
5 improve accessibility of licenses, permits and
6 registrations.

7 Notably, agencies learn a tremendous amount from
8 each other and we have also worked to incorporate
9 additional measures like brown bags and conversations
10 to learn from one another. In fact, in October, for
11 example, we worked with the Department of
12 Transportation to host a brown bag for agencies so
13 that DOT could share information about how it had
14 made licenses, permits and registration more
15 accessible through their online multi-lingual
16 portals.

17 MOIA has continued to increase our own language
18 access capabilities and we have deepened the language
19 services work through Local Law 30 in coordination
20 with other Mayoral Offices.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

22 BITTA MOSTOFI: Our services team has seen a
23 dramatic increase in the number of requests that we
24 have received. For example, saw a 500 percent
25 increase in the number of translations provided from

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2 2018 to 2020. The complexity of documents and the
3 number of languages into which documents have been
4 translated has also increased. We have tried to work
5 nimbly to respond to the rise in demand and to
6 provide access or support to agencies as they have
7 needed it. We have integrated professional tools
8 and best practices ourselves, so that we can better
9 inform how agencies do this work.

10 As one example, we piloted a tool for our website
11 that does human translation in all the City's top 10
12 languages instead of Google translate. The work that
13 we do with our agencies and have done to implement
14 Local Law 30 has helped to establish a robust and
15 collaborative foundation on which we still have a lot
16 of work to do to build. Today, all agencies have
17 plans, they all have coordinators, they have
18 contracts for professional language services vendors
19 and they are regularly attending and engaging with
20 our office to improve the accessibility of the work.

21 I am going to skip to COVID-19 response in the
22 interest of time. Despite this progress on language
23 access during recent years, COVID revealed the work
24 that still remains. The pandemic showed us that the
25 City still faces tremendous challenges in quickly

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2 disseminating multilingual information to New Yorkers
3 who do not speak English. Some of the ways in which
4 we responded was first as in other emergencies, we
5 worked with the Emergency Management Office to
6 convene a task force on language access. We did this
7 in early March, we worked to identify the issues or
8 challenges that would arise and how we could better
9 coordinate resources and reach the most New Yorkers.
10 Through this task force, we worked most closely with
11 the Department of Health to ensure that that agency
12 is the lead agency, had ample language services,
13 resources and were addressing the critical need to
14 make sure that this was more inclusive than just the
15 city's top ten languages.

16 So, moving to 25 translations for languages
17 across that agency and also coordinated with pro bono
18 vendors to add services if they were needed.

19 MOIA also coordinated extensively with other
20 agencies during the pandemic. We relied on our
21 network of language access coordinators to provide
22 regular guidance, technical assistance, particularly
23 around digital resources as it became more critical
24 during this moment and time. We responded to urgent
25 needs that were brought to our attention from

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2 community partners, including expanding our own
3 budget and working with our translation vendor to
4 secure faster translations in a more effective and
5 efficient way.

6 Our Language Services team alone experienced an
7 over 580 percent increase in the number of
8 translation projects that we delivered in Fiscal Year
9 2020 as compared to 2019. We also adjusted our
10 communications and outreach strategies to ensure
11 faster dissemination of critical and ever changing or
12 feeling old content. We developed shorter graphics
13 with plainer language that we could develop quickly.
14 We created audio messages in different languages and
15 we worked to do virtual town halls and convenings as
16 well and in many different languages with our agency
17 partners.

18 Finally, we developed multilingual resources that
19 could serve us as centralized place for New Yorkers
20 and our incredible infrastructure of community based
21 providers across the City to have access to something
22 that we continue to readily update and also informs
23 the frequently asked questions that we have developed
24 and continue to translate. It is available in 25
25 different languages. In response to specific

1 requests that we received from business owners, we
2 worked with SBS to improve the translation of key
3 pieces of collateral into different languages and we
4 have increased access to information with webinars,
5 technical assistance and digital advertising in many
6 different languages. SBS has also established a
7 business assistance hotline that can serve people in
8 over 2,200 languages in response to some of the
9 issues that were presented.
10

11 Similarly, the Department of Consumer and Worker
12 Protection took additional steps to make critical
13 information more accessible and I know they will be
14 speaking momentarily to share some of that.

15 Finally, while the City has made significant
16 progress in integrating language access into agency
17 operations and planning, we know that there is still
18 a tremendous amount of work to be done to realize the
19 true vision of Local Law 30.

20 We are committed to continuing to work with the
21 Council and our agency partners and community
22 providers in trying to address these gaps and improve
23 language access in our city. As we endeavor to
24 support New Yorkers with LEP across many facets of
25 this ongoing crisis, we will rely on the work that we

1
2 have done and the lessons that we have learned to
3 improve these experiences in short order.

4 Thank you again for calling this hearing. I
5 thank the Committee for taking this important top
6 very seriously and look forward to the conversation.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
8 I would like to note that Council Member Eugene has
9 joined us for the record. We will now turn to
10 testimony from DCWP Executive Director Steve
11 Ettannani. You may begin when you are ready.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 STEVE ETTANNANI: Good afternoon Chair Menchaca,
14 Chair Cabrera and members of the Committees. I am
15 Steven Ettannani, Executive Director of External
16 Affairs for the Department of Consumer and Worker
17 Protection.

18 On behalf of Commissioner Salas, I want to share
19 our thanks and appreciation to the Committees for
20 continuing to elevate the voices of New York's
21 vibrant and diverse immigrant communities across the
22 City. Now more than ever before, our collective work
23 is vital to ensuring the health safety and prosperity
24 of all New Yorkers.

1
2 Our city has one of the most diverse marketplaces
3 in the world, and language access is a special
4 responsibility for our city government to take up on
5 behalf of New Yorkers. Commissioner Salas, as an
6 immigrant and as an alumnus of our CUNY system and
7 its commendable programs to serve new New Yorkers of
8 limited English proficiency, has since her
9 appointment, made language access a priority for our
10 agency across all our programs. With the passage and
11 implementation of Local Law 30, we have steadfastly
12 worked to execute a language access plan that
13 supports all our constituencies. First and foremost,
14 whenever a New Yorker visits our offices, financial
15 empowerment centers, licensing center or small
16 business support center, they will find multilingual
17 signage and collateral informing them of the
18 availability of free and real time interpretation
19 services, through our vendor Language Line.

20 Should constituents with limited English
21 proficiency request assistance onsite or contact us
22 by other means, our staff is trained to utilize these
23 interpretation services. Similarly, all of our
24 inspectors are trained with Language Line, and
25 equipped with cards that describe interpretation

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2 services in 20 languages. When they encounter a
3 merchant with limited English proficiency in the
4 field, they leverage these services to communicate
5 during an inspection.

6 As we testified to you at our hearing on
7 workplace safety last Friday, DCWP has continued to
8 serve our workers, consumers, and businesses with
9 important information and equitable language access.

10 At the start of the pandemic, we launched
11 nyc.gov/dcwp/alerts as a dedicated landing page for
12 the public to view updated Department guidance during
13 the crisis.

14 On the webpage, the information we provide is
15 translated in at least the ten designated citywide
16 languages.

17 Other documents found on the landing page include
18 those developed with New York City's Small Business
19 Services and the Department of Health and Mental
20 Hygiene. These resources, again each translated into
21 the ten designated languages, address broad public
22 safety protocols as well as guidance for what
23 employers must do before they reopen, what workers
24 should expect and how to reach out to the City if
25 there are questions. Two weeks ago, we also issued

1 reopening guidance on our landing page for domestic
2 workers, many of whom have immigrant backgrounds or
3 have preferences for languages other than English.

4 As the home of the City's dedicated Paid Care
5 Division, this guidance incorporates public health
6 and safety guidelines on behalf of a vulnerable and
7 traditionally underserved workforce trying to
8 navigate safety in a unique workplace environment.

9
10 Lastly, since March, DCWP has conducted over 300
11 virtual and in-person outreach events. At our
12 events, we provide translated outreach materials,
13 real time interpretation services to New Yorkers.
14 These events also include over 30 business education
15 days where we visited more about 2,100 business,
16 disseminating guidance on safe reopening standards,
17 helping merchant associations and business
18 improvement districts to distribute personal
19 protective equipment as well.

20 Turning now to Introduction 63, this legislation
21 requires the agency to record the language of
22 preference of our licensees, translate post-
23 inspection communications to licensees and utilize
24 their language preference for their specific post-
25 inspection communication. DCWP already offers

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2 licensees the opportunity, both on their new license
3 applications or renewal applications, to choose a
4 language of preference. Of more than 70,000
5 licensees, 2,500 have indicated a language preference
6 other than English. I would also note that many
7 businesses we inspect are not licensees of DCWP,
8 although they are still required to comply with the
9 City's Consumer Protection Law, the City's workplace
10 laws or other consumer and worker protections.

11 As I mentioned earlier in my testimony, when we
12 visit any business location, our inspectors are
13 trained how to access real time interpretation. DCWP
14 has concerns regarding the fiscal implications of
15 this legislation and broadly, how best to approach
16 meaningful language access. Fiscally, the agency
17 would encounter a tremendous burden -

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

19 STEVE ETTANNANI: In translating documents
20 outside the scope of our language access plan.
21 Furthermore, the materials contemplated by this bill
22 for translation are often uniquely specific to an
23 individual or business. Notice of hearings, for
24 example, include direct references to the
25 administrative code and even contemporaneous notes by

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2 our inspectors. In such cases, DCWP believes it is
3 more effective to provide real time interpretation to
4 our merchants should they have questions about their
5 inspection.

6 To conclude, I want to reiterate that DCWP and
7 this Administration, are committed to providing
8 equitable and fair language access to New Yorkers. I
9 would like to thank you for the opportunity to
10 testify today and I look forward to any questions you
11 may have.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
13 I will now turn it over to questions from Chair
14 Menchaca followed by Chair Cabrera. Panelists,
15 please stay unmuted if you can during this question
16 and answer period. Thank you. Chair Menchaca,
17 please begin.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you and I want to
19 say thank you to Commissioner Mostofi and Executive
20 Director Ettannani for being here today and talking
21 about this really, really important service that the
22 City is committed to, not just because of its
23 commitment to immigrants but also because of Local
24 Law 30 and I think what we are going to try to do is
25 really focus on just how we can work better together

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2 to ensure that our communities have the services that
3 they are needing right now and if there are hurdles
4 to identify them and remove them from completion.

5 And so, there is no doubt that I know that your
6 agencies are working really hard to ensure that there
7 are services.

8 I think what we want to do is just get a sense
9 about what is the issue. You have heard from the
10 first panel that even now, with incredible progress
11 that both of you are really speaking to, you have
12 families that are separated from information that is
13 going out in English and not getting to them and so,
14 everything that we are doing right now is not
15 working. And so, we are really maybe and that's the
16 first kind of big question is what is the hurdle
17 here? Where are we in deficiency? Is this a
18 strategy issue? Is this a funding issue? And let's
19 start there. Maybe Commissioner Mostofi, you want to
20 start?

21 BITTA MOSTOFI: Sure, yeah, thank you for the
22 question. You know, I will start you know, with sort
23 of a couple thoughts. When is a recognition that
24 it's a pretty new law right. Local Law 30 came into
25 sort of life in 2018 and you know that began the

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2 process of developing plans and the infrastructure
3 and then you are really talking about implementation
4 the last two years and looking at that. And I think
5 we have seen like how that has impacted the
6 difference I think maybe across some agencies. Where
7 some who were previously covered by Executive Order
8 120. It might be further along in the development or
9 the implementation of Local Law 30. It might have a
10 much stronger infrastructure and just culture, right.
11 Agency culture and just understanding language access
12 and sort of its more inherently a part of the work
13 and so, I do think that sort of like cultural shift
14 or change and prioritization takes time. And so, I
15 would just note sort of out the gate that that's an
16 observation right and we have tried to think through
17 and welcome additional thoughts. Sort of how best to
18 ensure that it's a top to bottom understanding and
19 priority. As I said, developing tools that can be
20 used and implemented. We have seen some agencies
21 move themselves to identify sort of full-time staff
22 that work on this issue. We have seen a lot of
23 progress across many, many, many agencies and kind of
24 how they are implementing Local Law 30 but I think
25 the number one thing I would say is a recognition

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2 that there is newness to the work and in particular,
3 there is you know, there is a difference sort of in
4 the ability to move quickly depending on where
5 agencies were at the start of implementation.

6 I would acknowledge that some that is resource
7 right but there is a resource gap in some of that.
8 Again, some agencies have been able to focus on
9 certain staff in the implementation process where
10 there have been gaps in resources around translation
11 or interpretation. We have been able to meet those
12 along the way. So, I don't think those have been the
13 clear hurdles but there is also, it's a growing
14 field. I guess that's the last thing I would say
15 before turning it to Anne.

16 Meaning that new tools or ideas are developed and
17 we are trying as MOIA to sort of test them and pilot
18 them to then be able to make the case more broadly
19 for their utilization across agencies. But even that
20 process you know, we are now as you know, piloting a
21 technology tool around website translation just
22 getting to the place of launching. It took you know,
23 six months to a year right, identifying a better
24 tool, working to bring on a vendor and then doing the
25 work to set it up and then get it out, right.

1
2 So, I just want to sort of say that kind of all
3 of these factors, right probably contribute to the
4 gaps and acknowledge that from the first panel we
5 heard I think mostly about gaps for languages that
6 are not covered by Local Law 30. There were some
7 acknowledgement that some of that – there are still
8 challenges with the Local Law 30 languages but many
9 of the specific things that we were hearing about
10 them, limited diffuse language or harder to reach
11 populations, right. You are talking about a sphere
12 of languages that fall outside the Local Law. So, I
13 think that presents a different kind of challenge as
14 well.

15 Anne, do you want to add anything to what I
16 shared?

17 ANNE MONTESANO: Yeah, I mean, I guess I would
18 just – can you hear me?

19 BITTA MOSTOFI: Yes.

20 ANNE MONTESANO: So, there is some feedback,
21 okay. Yeah, there has been tremendous progress over
22 the years and yet we know the work is ongoing and
23 there is a lot of work to do. What we really spent
24 the first few years of LL30 implementation doing is
25 really establishing what we call this language access

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2 infrastructure across all agencies and agencies kind
3 of came into this at different places, right.

4 So, we really wanted to make sure all agencies
5 have language access implementation plans. They all
6 have language access coordinators. They all have the
7 requisite contracts in place. We have seen a
8 tremendous increase in the expenditures relating to
9 language services over the years which I think is
10 just one indicator that agencies are doing better at
11 this and process is being made. It has been pretty
12 incredible to kind of review agencies progress and
13 see even the progress in terms of translated
14 materials, right. In calendar year 2019, DSS
15 translated over 1,400 materials into the Local Law 30
16 languages. Department of Transportation over 200
17 materials and you know there are other examples of
18 other agencies.

19 Agencies have made progress in terms of the
20 quality of the translation. So, agencies have gotten
21 additional contracts with secondary translation
22 vendors to do sort QA checks on those translations.
23 Agencies are developing glossaries as Bitta
24 mentioned, there are agencies that have done some
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2 reorganization to really approach the language access
3 implementation better at their agencies.

4 So, ACS you know hired another staffer and now
5 has more centralized staffers that kind of provide
6 centralized guidance and oversight on language
7 access. SBS has a language access coordinator but
8 they also have language access division leads. And
9 so, it's also really interesting I think not just to
10 see you know, in terms of numbers the provision of
11 language services but one thing we also try to get
12 agencies to think about is how are you structured
13 internally to be able to do this work and we have
14 seen different examples of that.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Anne for – and
16 both of you really to kind of share perspective. I
17 think that there are couple of things that I just
18 want to maybe set, reset in this conversation and
19 while Local Law 30 is new, the Executive Order 120
20 was in place for a long time and that had a smaller
21 amount of languages that were required for
22 translation and engagement from the Administration,
23 well from the City.

24 And so, which is why we have I guess what you are
25 kind of laying out, a long term relationship with

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2 restructuring agencies and the Local Law went a
3 little bit further which is why we are really wanting
4 to really understand whats the issue here and I think
5 with COVID, this has really presented not just an
6 opportunity but a recommitment to these languages at
7 the onset.

8 You have heard from the advocates about new ideas
9 that can actually serve languages that are outside
10 the 10. We are talking about some of the indigenous
11 languages but also even Spanish in the DOE, we are
12 hearing from advocates that Spanish still becomes an
13 afterthought in the initial release of information.

14 So, I think this is deeper. I think this is
15 deeper than the newness of a law. The kind of
16 working with agencies. This doesn't seem like a
17 priority for this Administration when people need
18 information about what's happening at a very rapid
19 pace. And you know, I think, I was just kind of
20 thinking about like what do we have to do to get this
21 to happen and essentially, it's like every time an
22 English message comes out, it has to be met with all
23 the other languages or else it doesn't go out. And
24 if that were a hurdle, then we are all feeling the
25

1
2 need for information like our immigrant populations
3 and non-English speaking LEP communities.

4 And I think that's urgency. When I said that I
5 felt it. That's what we are not seeing right now.
6 And so, I think, I have some other questions about
7 some of the pieces that you laid out but I want to
8 give you an opportunity to respond to that and then
9 hand it over to Chair Cabrera.

10 BITTA MOSTOFI: Sure, I mean, I can respond. You
11 know whatever things that Anne noted is, you know,
12 its not that we haven't devoted resources or
13 priorities here and one indicator of course is money,
14 right. Is how much money has been spent
15 comparatively to before the passage of Local Law 30
16 and its literally and this isn't even encompassing of
17 the entirety of the expenditure or even some of the
18 agencies that you listed that are outside of from the
19 Local Law 30 infrastructure like DOE, like H&H, right
20 that have their own budgets and operations around
21 language access. We have seen since the
22 implementation of Local Law 30 literal doubling of
23 the amount of money that has been spent through the
24 key vendors, the DCAS contracts to translation and
25 interpretation services.

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2 So, going from about \$5 million to about \$10
3 million, that's not insignificant, right. Just to in
4 what we can look at and sort of use to understand you
5 know our people prioritizing this from you know
6 internal to like the outcome to the actual dollars
7 that are being put towards here and the answer I
8 think is yes that's happening, is it happening at the
9 pace in which it is critical to happen and I think in
10 the pandemic you know one of the challenges is,
11 people got to a place where your timeline is set for
12 releasing something and so you are budgeting within
13 that timeline a certain process for translation and
14 we have really emphasized and spoke to this a little
15 bit, the importance of quality assurance and
16 recognizing that you know what's that point in doing
17 the translation if you are not getting it right,
18 right. And that's an ongoing issue that we continue
19 to need to look at and work on and so time gets
20 budgeted or allocated to ensure that that's done
21 effectively and the pandemic sort of flipped that
22 switch a little bit which is there isn't time right.

23 So, in thinking about your question of like the
24 urgency and making the decision of do I release the
25 English language before I have the other languages in

1
2 place because I want to ensure that there is a
3 process to do that effectively. Those were decisions
4 that were you know, made and we did make some
5 adjustments to ensure that we within a 24 hour period
6 could get where we needed to get but I would lie if I
7 said that. That wasn't a challenges for all the
8 reasons that I articulated.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: I guess my main point is
10 that if this were a priority, we would figure out how
11 to do this. At the microlevel organizations like say
12 some of our district offices, the build capacity for
13 x, y, and z. And I think that's what we are trying
14 to highlight here and really trying to figure out
15 what that leap is.

16 But we will talk about those pieces after the
17 members talk because I want to give everybody else an
18 opportunity to ask questions and then we can drill
19 down on some of that because what we want to come out
20 of this conversation today is a sense of partnership
21 and coalition that include you all who are on the
22 inside and will be able to fight with us for those
23 resources, strategy and focus. Chair Cabrera?

24 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you to my Co-Chair.
25 As a matter of fact, if I may, let me just follow up

1
2 briefly the costs since you mentioned DCAS from \$5
3 million to \$10 million, did I hear correctly
4 Commissioner?

5 BITTA MOSTOFI: Yes.

6 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Okay, so you know, here are
7 my brief thoughts before I go into my line of
8 questions. We are spending close to, actually over
9 \$1 billion when it comes to PPE, food distribution.
10 So, I would think to be honest with you, that's very
11 little money if it is going to sabotage or interfere
12 or create speed bumps for people to get the
13 information that they need.

14 I am not minimizing \$5 million but is that \$5
15 million going to affect the efficiency and
16 effectiveness of the DOE, Department of Health
17 because communication is everything. That you know,
18 something for us to reconsider that it is money very
19 much well spent. And to look at maybe if we need to
20 start looking at in-house or whether you know, coming
21 up with some other innovative ways to going about it.
22 I don't know if you want to respond to that but if
23 not, I will get to my questions.

24 BITTA MOSTOFI: Sure, I can briefly. You know as
25 I noted I was just pointing as an indicator that

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2 progress has happened quickly over two years, right
3 to double.

4 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Okay.

5 BITTA MOSTOFI: That was more what I was pointing
6 out and I also want to recognize that in particular
7 some of the agencies that you noted, DOE, H&H, they
8 are not included in that number. You know, DOE has
9 an in-house unit actually which is arguably a best
10 practice for this work.

11 So, you know, I don't think we are unaligned. I
12 just wanted to point that out.

13 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Okay, I am glad to hear
14 that, that's so good. Let me get to DCWP, I know you
15 changed your name. I am so used to always calling
16 you Department of Consumers Affairs. But in what
17 language, if you could help me here quickly, I am
18 going to, if you could just give me the short version
19 because I have a few questions here. In what
20 languages are DCWP inspectors able to conduct
21 inspections without relying on interpreter or
22 interpretation services?

23 STEVE ETTANNANI: Thank you for the question
24 Chair. Our inspectors along with you know External
25 Affairs, the agency that I am representing and each

1
2 division. They certainly have their own language
3 expertise just inherently as staff members. I know
4 our inspectors are proficient in Spanish and Arabic
5 and depending on deployment and geography in some
6 cases, those inspectors are utilized strategically to
7 ensure that language gaps are addressed.

8 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Do you have the – I am
9 sorry, just to save you time. Do you have a specific
10 language that you use –

11 STEVE ETTANNANI: So, I can get back to you on
12 the exact number of languages.

13 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Okay.

14 STEVE ETTANNANI: But essentially what the
15 process is for inspectors when they go on a patrol
16 inspection, they enter a business where there is a
17 merchant or a business that may be LEP is that there
18 is a language card. A language line card that they
19 provide that has instruction in 20 different
20 languages and that merchant may be able to point to
21 the language and then language line is utilized to
22 bridge that gap to provide real time interpreter
23 services. Those 20 languages are just on the card.
24 The language line process, I think it is over 140,
25 150 different languages that could be accessed there.

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2 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: So, that leads me to the
3 next question. Are all DCWP inspection related
4 materials, including FAQ's and application forms
5 available in all ten city designated languages? And
6 if not, which materials are yet to be translated and
7 why?

8 STEVE ETTANNANI: So, thank you for the question.
9 I think it is really important that we kind of
10 discuss this a bit. Our language access plan is
11 actually, it identifies and articulates that we will
12 be translating the top five most distributed
13 materials into designated language as well as the top
14 five application materials related to the top five
15 licensed categories. Those licensed categories
16 include categories like secondhand dealers, tobacco
17 retail dealers, laundries and such. In terms of the
18 top documents, we are talking about things like our
19 free tax prep program brochures, our financial
20 empowerment brochures that connect individuals to
21 free financial counseling.

22 All of those materials are in process of being
23 translated for the public. In terms of inspection
24 and post inspection materials and this is what I was
25 alluding to a little bit in my testimony today is

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that we actually believe in terms of the post inspection materials that the best way to serve and bridge language gaps is through a real time interpretive service as opposed to translating documents that are often times unique and specific to the business at hand. For example, if an inspector visits a tobacco retail dealer, there maybe notes that the inspector makes in that document contemporaneously. That would be very resource intensive quite frankly for us to translate on a unique basis for each individual. As is to what occurred on that inspection and I think moreover and most importantly, we just don't think that's an effective way to kind of bridge language access gaps. As opposed to having a telephone number or a multilingual blurb which exists for things like notice of hearings already to ensure that folks have access to interpretive services over the telephone.

CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: So, if - so, help me understand this. If an individual does not read English proficiently, how are they to know that they can reach out to you to seek real time interpretation within this 30-day cure window? I know you want a

1
2 real time but if I can't read in English, how am I
3 going to know I have this opportunity afforded to me.

4 STEVE ETTANNANI: Yeah, so the notice of hearing
5 that is handed to a merchant has a multilingual
6 blurb. So, a merchant that receives that notice of
7 hearing is going to be able to you know, understand
8 that blurb and be able to contact us. I think also
9 practically speaking, a lot of folks call and make
10 appointments at DCWP and we will also have access
11 individually with staff to kind of bridge those gaps
12 as well using language line.

13 So, there is a level of interpretive or
14 translation that is on those documents. It's just
15 not the entire document for the reasons I mentioned
16 before because a lot of these documents are extremely
17 tailored to the business.

18 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: And how many language is in
19 the -

20 STEVE ETTANNANI: I believe it is seven or so but
21 I can get you the specific number and the individual
22 languages after this hearing.

23 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Now, the DCWP Language
24 Access Plan has not been updated since 2018 and we

1 don't have an updated timelines for the translations.
2
3 Can you please provide those to us?

4 STEVE ETTANNANI: Yeah, absolutely. I think and
5 perhaps the Commissioner can speak to this a little
6 bit more but we are a three year cadence in terms of
7 updating our Language Access Plan. I think as was
8 correctly mentioned by Chair Menchaca at the top of
9 the program. Our most updated Language Access Plan
10 is from 2018 and our next plan is due next year and
11 we will be updating on our progress on those matters
12 as well.

13 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Okay and last question to
14 you before I go to the Commissioner and talk about
15 Puerto Rico. How do the DCWP inspectors prepare
16 before – how do they prepare before they get for
17 inspection? Do they know the language in which they
18 – that the owners speaks and if so, you know, how
19 does that help?

20 STEVE ETTANNANI: Yeah, absolutely. So, right
21 now, it's part of our current process that there is a
22 question for licensees to note their language
23 preference to the agency. I believe \$2,500 or so
24 licensees already make that preference known to us.
25 In those cases, we use that information greatly. We

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2 for example, have scheduled inspections you know, if
3 its related to weights and measures or otherwise. We
4 will use that information to ensure that the
5 inspector that's going there is either prepared to
6 use language line or has you know, an institutional
7 knowledge or proficiency in that language before they
8 visit that business.

9 Also and I think importantly and as I mentioned,
10 this is really a top down approach. Our commitment
11 to language access flows down from Commissioner
12 Salas. She is an immigrant herself. She actually
13 instituted a program, the VIP program for inspection,
14 which offers the first touchpoint that a new licensee
15 would have with our agency is an educational visit.

16 So, when a business for example, indicates a
17 preference for a language, we ensure that the
18 collateral, the educational and outreach materials
19 that we bring to that educational visit is in the
20 language that they prefer and as indicated to us.

21 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you so much.

22 Commissioner, real quick regarding the Office of
23 Puerto Rico New York City Affairs, what kind of
24 resources we would need in order to establish an
25 Office of Puerto Rico New York City Affairs?

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2 BITTA MOSTOFI: I can't speak to that question
3 unfortunately, I am sorry. That's not within my
4 bailiwick but also, something that we have tried to
5 make very clear as the Office of Immigrant Affairs is
6 that Puerto Ricans aren't immigrants, that they are
7 U.S. citizens and we have instead tried to advice our
8 sister agencies, for example in the aftermath of
9 Hurricane Maria, when service centers are hubs were
10 created to support folks on just best practice and
11 helping new arrivals and then making sure information
12 was available in the Spanish language but I think we
13 would have to get back to you on your initial
14 question.

15 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Do we have anybody because
16 we knew we were going to have a hearing regarding
17 this bill. Do we have anybody here in the
18 Administration to address this bill?

19 I guess our staff will reach to their staff in
20 the backend, maybe we can get somebody on board
21 because this is an important bill. I have a lot of
22 questions; I am sure my Co-Chair does as well in
23 light of what happened in Puerto Rico. I don't even
24 know how many people from Puerto Rico came and living
25 here permanently, what would this cost? I mean, this

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2 is an important bill. You know, what kind of
3 staffing we are going to need? What kind of
4 coordination's do we have with Puerto Rico and I know
5 you mentioned they are not immigrants. I, you know,
6 I full know that but sometimes it feels like a colony
7 to be honest with you. And so, Puerto Rico in this
8 so-called common well situation is in a very - living
9 in an impossible situation, literally and I know this
10 goes beyond what the City could ultimately do as a
11 federal government but I will appear to my Co-Chair
12 and I will give it back to him. But we do need
13 answers especially since we had a hearing on this
14 particular important bill.

15 And also in light of the fact that Council Member
16 Torres, soon to be a congressman, we have a limited
17 amount of time for him to get his duties right now
18 getting trained to become a congressman in DC.

19 So, Co-Chair, I give it back to you.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

21 BITTA MOSTOFI: Briefly, sorry, I would just add
22 like with any agency there would need to be an
23 assessment on the mission or goals of an
24 organization, right. Infrastructure would need to
25 look like by way of all the things, right. What they

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2 are required to do and what is needed to be put into
3 place to do that. That's my understanding generally
4 of how that would work but I can't speak to more
5 specifics on this question.

6 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: And Commissioner, I didn't
7 want to put you in the spot because really - it was
8 not ultimately but you were the closest person in the
9 Administration to get an answer here. I didn't see
10 anybody else here, so I had to go it your way. But
11 in all fairness to the Council Member, to the Chairs
12 on this committee and to be honest, to Puerto Ricans,
13 we need to have answers. Specific answers so we
14 could move appropriately on this bill.

15 And so, with that, Co-Chair. Thank you
16 Commissioner.

17 BITTA MOSTOFI: Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Co-Chair and I
19 do have some questions but I do want to emphasize the
20 need for someone to get back to us about this bill.
21 This essentially can move through the Council without
22 any response from the Mayor's Office and we don't
23 want that. We want to work with you to really build
24 something out.

1
2 So, as a Mayor Representative, I hope that we can
3 get that and if it could happen in real time, we will
4 take it too and we will guide you right into this
5 hearing. I want to say one more thing about that.
6 That while Puerto Rican, Diaspora in the City of New
7 York are as you are labeling them not immigrants, I
8 think that this presents us an opportunity to rethink
9 the City's response to the LEP community in our City
10 and these are folks that are, they may be citizens
11 and not speak English. And so, this is really going
12 to I think confront all of our preconceived notions
13 about communities and how we label them and instead
14 really kind of focus on the access to services and
15 removing language barriers for anyone and everyone.

16 And so this is something that I have learned as
17 the Chair of the Immigration Committee that we are
18 really talking about just New Yorkers and removing
19 barriers and I will just leave it there. Let's
20 continue that conversation.

21 I want to ask some questions about Local Law 30
22 and implementation and I understand that we just got
23 a report from you all, is that right? We have the
24 2019 report.

25 BITTA MOSTOFI: Yes.

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2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay. That was due in
3 June, correct?

4 BITTA MOSTOFI: Yeah, you know, I think as with
5 many things, really to the implementation of Local
6 Laws, we had requested an extension to give agencies
7 time in light of the pandemic to be responsive to the
8 reports requirements and deadline.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay and the reason I kind
10 of ask that is the report really brought back some
11 information that not much of it was – there were no
12 massive improvements in terms of agencies reupdating
13 their plans. And so, if you can just speak to that.
14 You didn't really see any – and look, we just got it
15 minutes ago. So, I am trying to skip through it.
16 So, is that true?

17 BITTA MOSTOFI: Sure.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: That essentially they have
19 not done the work that the Local Law is asking them
20 to do which is to update their plans and in this
21 moment where we are asking for critical emergency
22 information that they haven't necessarily improved
23 much since 2018.

24 BITTA MOSTOFI: So, I will say a couple of
25 things. We are also just reviewing the reports,

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2 right. We are sharing it with you in parallel to
3 MOIA receiving the reports and reviewing them. So,
4 that you have them in a more timely fashion.

5 But in terms of the plans, I think Steve spoke to
6 this. Local Law does not require an annual update on
7 the plans. It requires every three years an update
8 on the plans, meaning that next year is the time in
9 which the agencies are required to review their plans
10 and do an update to their plans.

11 So, what we are really looking at this year is
12 continued implementation of the plans that were
13 created last year.

14 ANNE MONTESANO: And can I just add, so, you
15 know, the law obviously as you know does require
16 annual reports and those agencies do submit to us
17 every year. I believe this is — you know we have
18 received now two cycles of their annual reports and
19 so those reflect sort of the progress they have made
20 on their implementation. And so, those are the ones
21 we are reviewing now.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay. I mean we are
23 looking forward to really understanding what that is
24 and I did hear that in 2020 one agency did upgrade or
25 update their plan and that was HRA. So, thank you.

1 ANNE MONTESANO: Can I actually clarify that?

2
3 So, DSS did provide their annual report. They post
4 that on their website, that's per Local Law 73, not
5 per Local Law 30 and so, all agencies are required to
6 have those updates and we collect those and review
7 them. But Local Law 30 doesn't require agencies to
8 post those reports but DSS has because they are
9 covered under a different law and they have done a
10 really great job. Their report is really exemplary
11 and we commend them for their work.

12 BITTA MOSTOFI: And I would note in light of the
13 fact that there is a requirement to do updated plans,
14 right for next year, that feedback for insights from
15 the Council or providers on particular agencies is
16 really helpful at this time.

17 STEVE ETTANNANI: I actually just want to correct
18 myself from earlier. We do actually have our – I had
19 mentioned that our last plan on our website was from
20 2018 and we actually have a plan from May 2020 that's
21 on our website. So, I can provide that link to you
22 Chair for your staff to review as well.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

24 STEVE ETTANNANI: So, I did want to correct the
25 record there.

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2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank you and
3 that will show up for the next years report in 2020
4 but thank you for that update and so, maybe to that
5 request Commissioner, the lag time between the times
6 we get the report - like here we are getting one that
7 was published in May but I think that there is an
8 opportunity to do something completely different here
9 and I don't want to lose the voice of the first panel
10 that are offering a whole different way of updating
11 plans at the agencies and creating new infrastructure
12 that they can sort of vetting themselves into if we
13 have the resources and strategy and leadership across
14 the board and I think that that's more exciting.
15 That's more what we think is not just game changing
16 but could be quick in implementation and so, maybe
17 that's what we can do is commit to sitting down and
18 saying okay, how are we going to anticipate a budget
19 this next June that has these resources. Make sure
20 that that happens so that we can start getting all
21 the agencies to support in this kind of hub kind of
22 way language access and translations and all the
23 things that we need.
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2 So, that's not here yet but that's really the
3 vision I think that I want to offer in response to
4 your willingness to sit down with us.

5 Okay, question. So, Local Law 30 of 2017
6 requires the City to publish the 10 citywide
7 designated languages based on specific formula using
8 census and DOE enrollment. How often does the
9 Mayor's Office access which language are the 10
10 citywide designated languages?

11 BITTA MOSTOFI: So, we did the initial assessment
12 in 2018 in advance of the plans being developed and
13 implemented. There is nothing that specifically
14 indicates the frequency in which we should but I
15 think you know, we have internally discussed that we
16 think coming on the sort of every three revision of
17 the plans, it makes sense for us to do a check, right
18 on whether or not we are still in the right sort of
19 focus on the 10 languages. But that's something also
20 we are open to feedback. We haven't made a final
21 decision around.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, I think we might
23 have some ideas that we might want to share with you
24 all about that.

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2 Next, a review of the language access plans of
3 COVID-19 show that very few have been updated. We
4 just talked about that. Which do you think and this
5 is more of a question about your current
6 conversations. Which do you think will be working
7 with you to get those things updated and maybe that
8 can help connect to the idea that we just had, which
9 is maybe work with them since they are rolling on it
10 to really build this new pilot.

11 BITTA MOSTOFI: I am sorry, I am not sure I
12 understood the question.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Are there any agencies
14 that are really aggressively working with you to
15 update their plans and which ones are they, so that
16 we can work with them to maybe build out this pilot.

17 BITTA MOSTOFI: We work with all of the agencies,
18 right that are identified under the Local Law and as
19 you have sort of the update on progress on
20 implementation of Local Law 30 and so, part of our
21 job at this point is while continuing the existing
22 efforts is in reviewing the updates ascertaining sort
23 of where we want to or will need to focus by way of
24 additional supports or needs to get people to
25 stronger places.

1
2 I think on the plans, that's - people have not
3 yet begun their work on the plans. Those are due
4 next year, so as I said, this is an early time to
5 start conversations around what those could look
6 like.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay. Is MOIA copied on
8 the Language Access Complaints that 311 receives and
9 if so, how does MOIA work to ensure that these
10 complaints are addressed?

11 BITTA MOSTOFI: Yeah, so, we have been working
12 really closely actually in the last few months with
13 311 at trying to address what we think are just
14 systems that can be better and ones in which we can
15 all do a better job of being held accountable to.

16 So, we are changing; this is technical to our 311
17 purposes but we are changing the sort of label or tag
18 that these complaints received, so that now they get
19 essentially held also by DoITT. So, by the 311 team
20 as well as our office and they are delivered to an
21 agency with a period of time to resolve them which is
22 not what currently happens. So, it is harder to sort
23 of do a follow up or to be responsive to them.

24 So, this is a bigger systems change that DoITT
25 has been an incredible partner with us on as now sort

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2 of taking over the implementation of 311 and we hope
3 - we are ready, sort of in the midst of changing this
4 process. And we will hopefully have a sense soon of
5 when it will complete.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: So, having a district
7 office where we are constantly being challenged to
8 communicate multiple languages, and even were are
9 going through evolution often about how we do that.
10 How rapidly can we do that and building out the staff
11 to make that happen and working with partners. We
12 think a lot about feedback and so, I am thinking
13 about 311 as a place where people can go to make a
14 complaint or make a suggestion. Does MOIA have a
15 mechanism in which they let people know that 311 is
16 that way through to the City to say hey, this didn't
17 work for you so tell us and what does that look like?

18 BITTA MOSTOFI: Yeah, we do it in a few ways and
19 progress has been made already systemwide. I should
20 acknowledge on the 311 side in that those complaints
21 can be recorded now without having to call, right.
22 Which didn't previously exist; that's within the last
23 year and now again we are trying to improve that
24 system in the way that kind of accountability and
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2 solutions I should say have to happen from the
3 complaints.

4 So, you know that's been one area of focus is
5 just that systems and sort of operations question.
6 In terms of educating people on this avenue of
7 submitting complaints, it's a part of the work that
8 we do as an agency in terms of ensuring people know
9 kind of what their rights are and what to do in the
10 events that they are not receiving information in the
11 languages that they have the right to. We
12 additionally work to ensure that this is a part of
13 the training, that we work with our rights providers
14 around and it is also a part of what our constituent
15 services team will identify and help to address.

16 Some agencies themselves have infrastructure to
17 receive these complaints and follow through on them,
18 which I think is notable because that is in some ways
19 where the majority will go. And then lastly, you
20 know, I think we are open to greater suggestions. I
21 think we recognize that a lot of people are receiving
22 this – or sorry, a lot of people who are LEP aren't
23 necessarily using that 311 channel, right. So, we
24 have been open to thinking through better ways of
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2 directly receiving the information or working
3 directly with sister agencies.

4 We have worked with the Mayor's Office of
5 Operations to work directly with agencies at looking
6 at their services on our own right, without waiting
7 if you will for complaints to come in but we are
8 certainly open to additional suggestions.

9 ANNE MONTESANO: One other way that we have
10 raised awareness -

11 BITTA MOSTOFI: Oh no, Anne went on mute. Can we
12 unmute Anne?

13 ANNE MONTESANO: Okay, I think I am back. One
14 other way that we have raised awareness about the
15 complaint channel is through developing multilingual
16 signage which we have distributed and so, some
17 agencies have that in their walk-in sites as well.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Got it, okay. What
19 guidance has the Mayor's Office disseminated to
20 agencies about serving the LEP population that do not
21 speak one of the 10 designated languages during an
22 emergency?

23 BITTA MOSTOFI: I will start but really Anne you
24 and Ken lead this effort, so you should really speak.
25 We, as I said, we work closely with OEM during any

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2 emergency effort. They will activate what is our
3 Language Access Taskforce and Anne, usually and/or
4 Ken will join immediately to help assess what the
5 language needs are for a particular population or
6 community in that emergency effort and work directly
7 with the agency that's the lead agency to put into
8 place the right measures, right. Whatever that might
9 look like and to make recommendations and so, Anne,
10 do you want to speak maybe more to specific, maybe
11 past emergency efforts and sort of what that looks
12 like or even in COVID, how we worked initially?

13 ANNE MONTESANO: Yeah, I mean I guess you know,
14 one of the things we did with the task force
15 initially is advise that DOHMH expand the number of
16 languages that they translate materials into.

17 So, they began translating into additional
18 materials. Other agencies do that to based on their
19 demographic, so you know, TLC often translates beyond
20 the 10 into Hindi and Punjabi. DFTA translates into
21 additional DOT based on their demographics and then
22 MOIA you know internally has gone beyond that.

23 I believe you know; we have tried to expand the
24 number of languages, we are communicating with I
25 think in 2019, you know we translated materials into

1
2 40 some odd languages. This calendar year it's been
3 I think like 54 languages. So, you know, we are
4 trying to be responsive to going beyond the Local Law
5 30 languages.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay. Please describe how
7 the Mayor's Office tests emergency messaging.

8 BITTA MOSTOFI: So, emergency messaging is lead
9 by OEM and they have worked to launch at least more
10 consistent platforms, right in Spanish and Chinese
11 language and so we have been working with them on
12 those improvements but also in looking sort of more
13 broadly at additional languages.

14 We know that there was a recent error in Spanish
15 translation on the school closing messaging and we
16 have been in conversation with OEM at ensuring that
17 that doesn't happen again and so, while they did have
18 secondary review of those messages already in place,
19 they are now adding a third layer to ensure that that
20 doesn't happen again.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you and I know we
22 are all moving so fast but these things have
23 consequences and I am thankful that you are looking
24 at that and I would love to work with you and try to
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1
2 figure out what you need from us to ensure that that
3 doesn't happen again. Thank you.

4 Let's talk about the Census because the Census
5 became this really collaborative effort where we saw
6 the need in different ways. The Council is committed
7 to bringing the resources and we did and the Office
8 of the Census went at it and was confronted with the
9 pandemic and they got us 2010 numbers essentially,
10 which is a heroic feat I think in a lot of ways and
11 where we are right now in communication. And the
12 fact that immigrants do not trust government right
13 now for all these different reasons. So, all that
14 aside, I would love to know about that success in
15 reaching LEP immigrant communities. Channels like
16 Whats App and We Chat and CAPO, what has MOIA done to
17 really extract that learning and build out a
18 different plan and incorporate it into how you are
19 updating agency plans and doing all the good work?

20 BITTA MOSTOFI: Yeah, so I will say a couple of
21 things. One, to just applaud what was truly a
22 citywide effort on the Census and really just a
23 shared kind of value and doing everything that we
24 could to overcome not just historical obstacles but
25 manmade ones by the Trump Administration and the

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2 pandemic itself, right. It was really kind of all
3 things working against a complete count but I think
4 because of just that shared partnership that you
5 articulated, this really incredible historic outcome
6 of going above what we were anticipated or projected
7 numbers even before the pandemic for the City. So,
8 it is really wonderful.

9 I think a few things and I would say not just
10 Census but the pandemic itself, right has provided us
11 with a lot of just lessons learned on kind of how we
12 shifted some of our work to be responsive and
13 reaching LEP New Yorkers and immigrant New Yorkers
14 kind of more broadly in this moment. And obviously
15 applying lessons learned in the past.

16 So, I will say a few things. One, is to the
17 digital sort of platforms that you spoke of. Our
18 team really focused early not just on Census but
19 across all of the information dissemination that we
20 have been doing to identify the right digital
21 platforms for different language speakers. Whether
22 it was We Chat or Whats up or [INAUDIBLE 1:52:57] or
23 you know, Facebook or Instagram and then from there
24 we developed unique content for those streams.

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So, you know, videos I think – or my team alone developed videos in 16 different languages. Audio messages in different language. Like social graphics which were more readily forwarded through those channels in the different means. I know I participated in events in We Chat or on Facebook many, many and so forth. So, that what we were doing was ensuring that we were leveraging what we could in a moment in which we needed to ensure that people were safe and precautions were taken.

Additionally and I think this speaks to the – sorry, emphasizes what the first panel shared was we did through our Emergency Relief effort actually require that all of the folks that were screened for that effort that came through community based providers were given information about the Census and were supported in completing the Census.

And so, we know thousands that came through that program. Also, completed the Census through it and our team worked closely to be on the ground with the Census teams. So, you know, going to food pantries, going to parks, just making ourselves available once we were able to right. And ensuring that our team

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2 was deployed that spoke the languages of the
3 communities that we were going into.

4 So, those are some of the efforts and to your
5 point, I think one that I didn't note also was around
6 website accessibility and we sort of worked to try
7 and address some of that by producing additional
8 guidance and doing additional trainings with folks.

9 So, those are some of the lessons learned that I
10 think will you know, consistently be ones we are
11 looking at in implementation around and advising
12 around. Anne, do you want to add anything to that?

13 ANNE MONTESANO: I don't think so.

14 BITTA MOSTOFI: Okay.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah and I am looking
16 forward to seeing all of the improvements in the
17 agencies that are in the middle of improving and
18 updating their plans to communicate.

19 Is that something that we can expect from these
20 agencies? Really embedding everything you just laid
21 out in terms of the kind of victories and the work
22 that you all did as an agency working with Census
23 team across the whole city apparatus?

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2 BITTA MOSTOFI: It will certainly be a part of
3 the efforts that we undertake around this work for
4 sure, yeah.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, thank you. We have
6 another question. What guidance has the Mayor's
7 Office disseminated to agencies regarding language
8 access provision for populations with lower rates of
9 literacy in their Native language? How has the City
10 prioritized disseminating critical COVID-19 related
11 information in non-written formats, such as video or
12 even audio?

13 BITTA MOSTOFI: Yeah, I will start and then Anne
14 you should get more specific. So, we did talk a
15 great deal about this specifically with DOH in
16 looking at how we were disseminating information.
17 So, DOH moved pretty quickly to video as well in the
18 kind of creation of their information right, in
19 different languages as I said, our team worked to do
20 audio messages as well as really plain language and
21 simple graphics in different languages as well as
22 video recordings or tapings in different languages.

23 So, sort of utilizing those kind of various
24 medians to try and disseminate information in
25 different languages but Anne, do you want to add

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2 anything by way of sort of systems and guidance
3 around this?

4 ANNE MONTESANO: No, I mean I think it's just an
5 area of ongoing work to you know, make sure that all
6 agencies are aware of these different ways of
7 communicating with their limited English speaking
8 customers and just kind of continuing to push out the
9 way we have done it and how they can kind of do that
10 work as well.

11 BITTA MOSTOFI: We focused on website
12 accessibility, like digital accessibility in the
13 early months because it was necessary and then as I
14 said, worked directly with certain agencies that we
15 new were kind of launching big efforts to think
16 through some of these pieces.

17 So, one example is around MOPT, maybe we could
18 talk - you want to talk a little bit Anne about how
19 we supported them? The tenant protection as well as
20 the Mayor's Office of sustainability.

21 ANNE MONTESANO: Yeah, sure I mean so for MOPT, we
22 did a lot of work with them to support their
23 translation efforts and making their website more
24 accessible. We worked a lot with OCME over the
25 summer to make their website more accessible. They

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2 have a multilingual banner I guess you would call it
3 on their home page and when you click on anyone of
4 those 10 languages, it says you know, info in Spanish
5 in Spanish and French in French and then you get a
6 page of information in that language.

7 And so, we have really been providing kind of
8 elbow to elbow technical assistance to agencies just
9 to improve that piece of it.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you for that. I
11 have a few more questions before we head to the
12 public testimony and I also want to acknowledge
13 Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez who has joined us.

14 So my next question is about Emergency
15 Preparedness Plans and NYCEM's plan states that the
16 Interagency Language Access Task Force would be
17 activated if the needs of an effected per population
18 exceed the capacity of that responding agency.

19 So, tell us a little bit about this Task Force
20 who staffs the criteria for this activation of the
21 Interagency Language Access Task Force.

22 BITTA MOSTOFI: Anne, you want to take it.

23 ANNE MONTESANO: Sure. So, like you mentioned,
24 there are number of different triggers that can be
25 met in order to launch the Task Force. We usually

1
2 consult very quickly with the NYC Emergency
3 Management Office to activate the Task Force. It is
4 comprised initially of NYSUM, MOIA, the lead agency.
5 So obviously, in the case of COVID, that's DOHMH and
6 then DSS is also usually involved in the beginning
7 just because they are a big agency and then others as
8 needed.

9 But what we try to do is right away figure out
10 what are the language access challenges? Does the
11 lead agency have the resources they need? What are
12 the language access challenges the lead agency may be
13 experiencing? And how can we coordinate our
14 resources.

15 So, a few of the initial things we did in that
16 task force back in March was you know, obviously
17 check in with DOHMH. How is your vendor? Are they
18 you know, giving you translations in the turnaround
19 time that you need? Do you need support of any other
20 agencies in terms of language services.

21 We you know, decided to expand the number of
22 languages to 25 languages that DOHMH materials would
23 be translated into. We knew there was a challenge
24 with quickly disseminating multilingual content and
25 so we you know, determined how can we support

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2 agencies who need quick turnaround? Whose own
3 contracts aren't providing the fast turnaround that
4 the situation demands and so, we had a few pro bono
5 resources come our way. We figured out internally
6 who should coordinate those resources. MOIA wound up
7 coordinating those resources and we were able to
8 offer some pro bono services to agencies so that they
9 could get faster turnaround.

10 And the Language Access Task Force is just one
11 piece, right. There is still outside of the Task
12 Force. MOIA is still working with all agencies and
13 in touch with language access coordinators and
14 fielding requests from agencies. You know, we
15 expanded our language services contract so that they
16 could accommodate the needs of other agencies as
17 well.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And just as a side note or
19 a connection to some of the other questions, that
20 contract that you just spoke to right now, is that
21 still part of the \$5 to \$10 million increase of the
22 larger —

23 ANNE MONTESANO: No, so that's a good question.
24 Yeah, that's an addition.

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2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: An addition, okay. It
3 would be great to work with you in a more kind of a
4 direct way to kind of get a sense of what we are
5 talking about because I think what this hearing is
6 really showing is that there is a lot of
7 infrastructure here. And we are trying to really
8 understand what's keeping us from filling the gap
9 that this hearing started with and so, a couple more
10 questions about this task force because I think it is
11 interesting or a question that can help eliminate
12 some of the issues. Are the needs of a single LEP
13 language population considered enough for the task
14 force to activate? So, one single LEP community.

15 BITTA MOSTOFI: Yeah, I mean we have seen that
16 with like I think in your district right with a fire
17 in a residence. It was mostly Chinese language
18 speakers who needed additional support and we
19 activated the task force for that, right. So, we
20 have definitely seen various instances where it is
21 really one focused language. Very often we will work
22 with not just the lead response agency but our Office
23 in Community Affairs in those instances to, to ensure
24 I think again, speaking to some of the best practice
25 that the first panel spoke about just the relational

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2 and cultural competency response, particularly in an
3 emergency where people are brightly upset and
4 aggrieved and that is really an important part of the
5 language access work as well.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And thank you for that and
7 I remember that. That was a really beautiful
8 partnership that got a lot of people connected to
9 services, especially with the housing piece. That
10 was not easy and that was a long commitment really at
11 the end of the day, so thank you for that.

12 This is another kind of angle to the same
13 question and idea. If just one agencies capacity to
14 respond to a situation in the language that is
15 required is overwhelmed. If they are overwhelmed
16 with the Language Access Task Force be activated.
17 So, there is an agency, they are trying and they
18 can't get it. Would that trigger?

19 ANNE MONTESANO: Uhm -

20 BITTA MOSTOFI: If -

21 ANNE MONTESANO: Go ahead Bitta.

22 BITTA MOSTOFI: No, was going to ask for
23 clarification of the question. So, if you got it, go
24 for it.

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2 ANNE MONTESANO: I think I understand the
3 question. So, its more when the lead agency, so
4 NYSUM has all these playbooks and they assign lead
5 agencies for various emergencies. So, you know, DSS
6 is the lead agency for Disaster Services Centers.
7 You know, in the aftermath of a hurricane, if there
8 is a disastrous service center DSS's need, DOH's need
9 in this case.

10 So, if the language needs are greater than the
11 need agencies capacity, that is one of the triggers.
12 So, I don't know if that totally answers your
13 question.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah, we want to get a
15 sense of this because we are obviously moving towards
16 the direction to build out the system. And so, we
17 are trying to figure out what causes a moment where
18 there is extra support and whether it's a language,
19 whether it's an agency that's over capacity and
20 really how to work with you to figure out how we can
21 offer resources. How to re-resource and you have
22 heard about the language bank and maybe this is an
23 opportunity to talk a little bit about your support
24 for the language bank and what that might be for this
25 larger conversation.

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2 BITTA MOSTOFI: Sure, I can start. We did I
3 think as the panel noted, we did meet with the panel
4 I think last year around the budget process to
5 understand the proposals and to kind of wrap our
6 heads around whether or not they aligned with our
7 thinking or whether we had questions. I do think
8 Aracelis I believe noted some of the questions that
9 we have, right about scalability. About how it would
10 work or partner with different agencies about
11 responsiveness to sort of what we are seeing or
12 trying to focus on not diminishing kind of the added
13 value.

14 We did in the aftermath of that – those
15 conversations continue some efforts that we had
16 already done but added onto and just conversations
17 with some of the lead organizations that have been
18 doing the cooperative development. Conversations
19 with SBS on that as the lead contracting agency. We
20 had conversations with interpretation cooperatives
21 that unfortunately announced their closure like had a
22 goal during the pandemic. And as well as actually
23 some international organizations that we needed
24 cooperatives and then separately we have talked to
25 the City of DC to understand their bank and I think –

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2 so we have been doing some work to inform our own
3 thinking and position around it. But I think that
4 there is probably still more to do in thinking
5 through the model.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Would you commit to
7 sitting down with myself and the Committee and the
8 advocates again, really in preparation for the
9 January plan as we get the better sense about what we
10 are – actually, we haven't even gotten to the
11 November plan. So, let's be real about that but I
12 think in the spirit of alignment here, would you
13 commit to sitting down with us and really kind of
14 looking at that together?

15 BITTA MOSTOFI: Sure.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Wonderful, thank you for
17 that. And the last question is about the Notify NYC
18 COVID-19 messages that people are getting in real
19 time. These are text messages; I am kind of pointing
20 to one of them. They are only available in English
21 and Spanish. And so, are there conversations right
22 now that are pointing to adding additional languages
23 and support for those specific text messages?

24 BITTA MOSTOFI: So, they are also available in
25 Chinese. You have to – the sort of how to sign up

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2 for them looks different but that's still something
3 that's available and you know, that was an addition
4 that's part of the sort of building out the
5 infrastructure conversation that we have had. This
6 along with the questions that we raised around
7 website and 311, these are sort of areas that we have
8 started a working group with DoITT around and as I
9 said, we have began our focus on the 311 complaint
10 system and the website accessibility and we are
11 looking at the others as well.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Got it, okay and so, I
13 have some follow ups actually. The HPD agency, HPD
14 states that their language access planet relies on
15 NYC Volunteer Language Bank. Do you know about this?

16 BITTA MOSTOFI: We know what the Language Bank
17 is.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: At HPD?

19 BITTA MOSTOFI: No, we have a centralized
20 volunteer language bank. It is not the first place I
21 should say that the agency should go, right.
22 Everybody has to have the vendor contracts. The bank
23 is an additional support for folks. Anne, maybe you
24 can talk about its utilization but that predates
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2 Local Law 30 and is an infrastructure that we have
3 trained agencies around.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, a little bit more
5 about how it works because it looks to us when we
6 read it that HPD – it's HPD's and it sounds like you
7 are saying that it's a different piece auxiliary
8 support for HPD that you all manage.

9 ANNE MONTESANO: There is a volunteer language
10 bank in city staff from all city agencies can enroll
11 if they want and use their bilingual skills. We
12 advise agencies that this resource be used for
13 example for translation review. That agencies get
14 contracts of professional vendors. My understanding
15 is that HPD does have the requisite contracts. They
16 have telephonic interpretation. They have a vendor,
17 I am sorry, a contract with a translation vendor.
18 They have in-person interpretation vendor. So, I
19 would have to check that specifically again but my
20 understanding is that they have the vendors and use
21 them primarily.

22 BITTA MOSTOFI: And they may be using the
23 language bank for that secondary review or third
24 review but we would have to double check.

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2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Got it. Yeah, that's
3 really curious. I would love to come and learn more
4 about how that works and what agencies are utilizing
5 it that may not have reported that they are using it
6 and just seeing where the flow of energy is going to
7 the city agencies and why they are using it.

8 Okay, I think this is the last one. I think this
9 is the last one for me. Okay, SBS; at first SBS did
10 not share information about the city's small business
11 loan program except for English. So first it was
12 just in English and unfortunately as a result of the
13 delay and publication of that information on digital
14 platforms, etc. to LEP populations, many LEP business
15 owners were unable to access the urgent assistance.

16 SBS's own language access plan states that it
17 incorporated an emergency preparedness plan to ensure
18 that LEP customers are able to access that language
19 service during an emergency. But it is not clear if
20 and where that plan exists and whether it was
21 implemented.

22 So, if you can kind of talk a little bit about
23 that and I don't know if you have worked with them on
24 that since that moment happened, less than a year
25 ago.

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2 BITTA MOSTOFI: Yeah again I can start in Anne,
3 you can jump in. I think yes, we were made aware and
4 certainly ourselves saw that there was not adequate
5 accessibility on the release of those opportunities.
6 We worked really closely with SBS in the aftermath of
7 that to address this as new resources were coming on
8 board and as we were pushing them out. That included
9 a few different things that we did.

10 One, is we devoted some of our language service
11 capacity to support them particularly around sort of
12 I think at the time when the next sort of payroll
13 protection program came out and was being
14 administered. We also worked to provide at a
15 capacity on virtual engagements in different
16 languages to support them and the development of
17 graphics and the videos and all the measures that I
18 previously talked about in different languages to
19 help disseminate them.

20 And we worked to ensure that as they kind of
21 moved towards lifting up their hotline, right, that
22 that was something that was in place with the
23 requisite interpretation services available. Anne,
24 anything you want to add by way of the plan or any
25

1
2 corrective measures that we have taken with them
3 since?

4 ANNE MONTESANO: I mean, only that they have also
5 made some improvements to their website in terms of
6 accessibility. We worked with them on that. I think
7 just in terms of the plan, you know, I think you
8 know, the new plans are due June 2021, we are going
9 to be starting that process with agencies early next
10 calendar year to revise their implementation plans.
11 And I think this is an important part of the plan
12 that we can focus on with agencies.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. I am sure a
14 lot of small businesses would be incredibly thankful
15 for that and maybe with that, I will just end with
16 incredible gratitude for your time today and for all
17 the promise that you have given us to sit down and
18 just hammer some of these things out, work in
19 coalition with our advocates on the ground.

20 Thank you to the advocate that started the
21 conversation in the public panel. Thank you for kind
22 of laying out the foundation and again, Happy
23 Thanksgiving to you and your family.

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2 BITTA MOSTOFI: Thank you so much. Thanks for
3 holding the hearing and we look forward to this
4 conversation.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Looking forward to it.
6 Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair, seeing no
8 other Council Member questions, we will now be
9 turning to – we will be concluding Administration
10 testimony and turning to public testimony. I would
11 like to remind everyone that we will calling on
12 individuals one by one to testify and each panelist
13 will be given three minutes to speak.

14 For panelists, after I call you name, a member of
15 our staff will unmute you. Please wait for a brief
16 moment for the Sergeant at Arms to announce that you
17 may begin before starting your testimony. Council
18 Members who have questions for a particular panelist,
19 should use the raise hand function in Zoom. I will
20 call on you after the panel has completed their
21 testimony in the order in which you have raised your
22 hand.

23 I would now like to welcome our first public
24 panel. First I will be calling on Jeehae Fischer to
25 testify. After that, I will calling on Ramatu Ahmed

1 followed by Alexandra Lee followed by Hallie Yee.
2
3 Jeehae Fischer, you may begin when you are ready.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Starting time.

5 JEEHAE FISHER: I would like to thank Chair
6 Menchaca and Chair Cabrera and the member of the
7 Committee on Immigration and Government Operation for
8 the opportunity to testify.

9 My name is Jeehae Fischer and I am the Executive
10 Director of the Korean American Family Service
11 Center. We provide social services to the immigrant
12 survivors and their children who are affected by
13 domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse.
14 All our programs and services are offered in a
15 culturally and linguistically appropriate setting.
16 98 percent of our clients are immigrants and 100
17 percent of our staff members are immigrants
18 themselves or children of immigrant parents.

19 Over 95 percent of our clients first language is
20 not English and come from low-income backgrounds.
21 During New York State on pause and throughout the
22 COVID-19 public health and economic crisis, KAFSC
23 responded to a 300 percent increase in calls to our
24 24 hotline. 80 percent were related to DV, domestic
25 violence and sexual assault and child abuse.

1
2 Between February and July 2020 KAFSC served 915
3 individuals and provided 19,802 services related to
4 domestic violence and sexual assault.

5 Our frontline essential workers met the increased
6 need and provided in-person crisis intervention,
7 counseling, case management and other supportive
8 services. All in a culturally and linguistically
9 appropriate setting. In addition to crisis
10 intervention, the needs we are hearing directly from
11 our serving populations are [INAUDIBLE 2:18:10] such
12 as ethnic food, groceries and cleaning supplies, cash
13 assistance for medical expenses or rent subsidies,
14 dissemination and education around the latest COVID-
15 19 virus information, information on public benefits
16 such as unemployment, Medicare, small loan
17 opportunities and accessing healthcare. As most of
18 our clients are uninsured. Inquiries of counseling
19 sessions with various family violence issues as
20 mentioned above, many of our clients and their
21 children are trapped at home with abusers for heated
22 family issues that have surfaced, as all members of
23 the family are cluster in a small space.

24 Our immigrant survivors were disproportionately
25 impacted and further traumatized by policies and

1
2 responses that excluded them from emergency relief
3 efforts. Many of our survivors are undocumented and
4 excluded from accessing unemployment insurance and
5 all other income supports.

6 The loss of financial means, some temporarily,
7 others permanently resulting in loss of livelihood
8 and aren't able to support themselves and their
9 children. These consequences are exacerbated as they
10 are invisible for unemployment benefits and other
11 labor protections by law from which they are
12 excluded.

13 Many in our community and their loved ones -

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

15 JEEHAE FISCHER: Have contacted the virus and
16 died. Without financial means, our immigrant
17 survivors can't afford food, rent, basic necessities,
18 personal protective equipment and supplies, Medicare
19 or basic living expenses.

20 Current policies do not account for immigrant
21 workers who lost their legal employment status as a
22 result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This gap result in
23 uncertainty and fear of deportation as another hurdle
24 to overcome in an already overwhelming and desperate
25 situation.

1
2 Furthermore, our immigrant families were affected
3 with the shift to remote learning. When schools
4 closed in March, our afterschool teachers spent extra
5 hours to bridge the digital gap. Many of our
6 families have multiple children which already did not
7 – and so, do not have the adequate number of digital
8 devices for virtual school.

9 Challenges due to limited English proficiencies
10 already increase the existing issues due to family
11 violence at home, poverty and cultural differences.
12 Particularly, the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent
13 closings of schools and business highlighted these
14 gaps even further.

15 Thank you again for this opportunity to testify
16 and I thank you for your time again.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
19 I would like to now welcome Ramatu Ahmed to testify.
20 You may begin when you are ready.

21 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

22 RAMATU AHMED: Thank you very much for inviting
23 me. My name is Ramatu Ahmed and I am the Founder of
24 the African Life Center, serving the African
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1
2 community in the Bronx and outer boroughs in the
3 city.

4 The African community as we all know is an
5 immigrant community. We have a lot of issues that
6 are in my presentation on housing for my testimony.
7 It is a great honor to testify on housing for the
8 African community. And the housing issues amongst
9 others is the overburdened rent that most people
10 can't afford.

11 I really care about housing because of safety
12 which is number one for everybody to live in harmony.
13 It is also evident that housing as a permanent abode
14 for people can contain the spread of the virus and
15 again, this is a testament as to what we have seen
16 now in our country.

17 When people are assigned to a house, they are
18 traced easily and then when tested for COVID-19.
19 So, providing them with housing prevents also crimes
20 from happening in the society. Unfortunately,
21 information on Housing doesn't get to the African
22 community. Those with the information, those
23 Africans or people who have the information, they
24 also lack the skills to access the services. For
25 instance filling out the application. And when I

1
2 received invitation to testify on behalf of the
3 African community, I sampled community members and
4 asked them questions about their experiences applying
5 for housing.

6 And I heard stories from first and second parties
7 on efforts they encountered in applying but all to no
8 avail. Some do ask their children to fill out the
9 application but they also fail to do so. They fail
10 to get a positive result. Some also complain they
11 applied but are always told they will be called and
12 it never happened. Using Housing Connect to access
13 housing, I mean it is also difficult for most of them
14 but also stressful for people with English as a
15 second language and again for seniors.

16 Programs like Housing Connect Ambassador program
17 don't have African organization contracted to
18 organize rent and financial counseling to the
19 community members.

20 So, I want to line up the challenges.

21 Number one, the Housing Connect Ambassador
22 program is not felt in the African community. There
23 is also difficulty locating apartments from one to
24 four bedrooms. Navigating housing connect becomes
25 cumbersome for most people and again selected

1 candidates for housing end up not eligible. Most
2 issues are related to their income or after the
3 interview -

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 RAMATU AHMED: Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

8 I would like to now welcome Alexandra Lee to testify.
9 You may begin when you ready.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 ALEXANDRA LEE: Good afternoon. On behalf of OCA
12 New York, I would like to thank the Immigration
13 Committee Chairs Council Members Menchaca and Council
14 Member Cabrera on the Committee Members for providing
15 this time to speak on the issue of language access in
16 New York City.

17 OCA Asian Pacific American Advocates is a
18 national nonprofits civil rights org promoting and
19 protecting the political economic and cultural rights
20 of Asian Americans in United States. Founded in
21 1973, the organization has grown to over 50 chapters
22 and affiliates around the country working with
23 organizational partners and members of policy issues
24 affecting the AAPI community, such as immigration,
25

1 racial equality inclusion and civic engagement. The
2 New York Chapter has been especially active in
3 participation efforts, Get out the vote. Hate Crimes
4 Prevention and in conjunction with the Black Lives
5 Matter Movement.
6

7 A lot of our testimony mirrors the Asian American
8 Federations testimony, so I don't want to be sort of
9 repetitive and we are happy to submit our written
10 testimony at the end. The issue of language access
11 directly impacts New York City and New York City's
12 Asian American population. New York City is home to
13 nearly 1.2 million documented and undocumented Asian
14 Americans representing more than 13 percent of the
15 city's total population. New York City's Asian
16 communities tremendously diverse comprising of
17 individuals representing more than 20 countries in 45
18 languages and dialects. Many of New York City's
19 Asian American population experience high rates of
20 limited English proficiency and other language
21 barriers when accessing the New York City services.

22 In a time when federal policy directly impacts
23 the immigration population, they bring preference to
24 those with English language proficiency for example
25 in the public charge issue or the proposal to instate

1
2 a more complicated U.S. citizenship exam. Language
3 access is a necessity for our community. Whether it
4 is securing justice for crime victims, protection for
5 domestic violence and intimate partner violence
6 victims or access to health service and healthcare,
7 there was an urgent need for language access for the
8 LEP community to be able to understand and
9 communicate effectively in this dynamic. Especially
10 now, with the COVID pandemic, the issue of language
11 access has really heightened and exacerbated the
12 problem of how the lack of language services impacts
13 the impact population of New York. The Asian
14 American population and the limited English
15 proficiency population as a whole.

16 I just want to give my two cents of my personal
17 position as the Immigration Attorney and Criminal
18 Defense Attorney, we see the issue of language
19 access.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

21 ALEXANDRA LEE: Being a very serious problem in
22 the access to justice. There are limited translation
23 services within the legal justice system and
24 especially during this time during the COVID
25 pandemic, it is even more of a challenge. Everything

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2 has gone to sort this telephonic and virtual services
3 and it is very challenging. It have of course
4 impacted folks with limited resources that don't have
5 the access to technology to access these services.

6 So, with that OCA New York and myself personally,
7 we encourage the City Council to work with CBO's and
8 organizational partners providing language access for
9 the limited English proficiency community, especially
10 during this unprecedented time during the COVID
11 pandemic.

12 Thank you for this time.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Ms. Lee.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

15 I would like to now welcome Hallie Yee to testify.

16 You may begin when you are ready.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

18 HALLIE YEE: Good afternoon. My name is Hallie
19 Yee and I am Policy Coordinator at the Coalition for
20 Asian American Children and Families and thank you
21 Chairs Menchaca and Cabrera and members of the
22 Committees for giving us this opportunity to testify.

23 Since 1986, CACF has been the nations only Pan
24 Asian children and families advocacy organization
25 that leads the fight for improved inequitable policy

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2 systems funding and services to support those in
3 need.

4 We speak on behalf of our highly immigrant Asian
5 American communities today who have been left behind
6 in the city's COVID response and must be centered in
7 discussion in revitalization as they face greater
8 challenges and loss due to this pandemic.

9 Immigrant New Yorkers have been at the forefront
10 of the states fight against COVID representing one-
11 third of the states essential workers and playing a
12 key role in all sectors of our battle against the
13 pandemic.

14 From food production and delivery to construction
15 and front line healthcare provision, this ongoing
16 exposure has contributed to the disparate outcomes to
17 COVID-19 infection and death which have
18 disproportionately afflicted immigrant communities of
19 color.

20 On behalf of our 40 plus organizational partners
21 and members, we have been asking City Council to hold
22 our public health systems accountable to our
23 communities needs through three key steps. First,
24 that the City provide accurate data collection and
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2 disaggregation of data on infection rates,
3 hospitalizations and deaths in the APA community.

4 Second, that the City address mental health needs
5 of children and families especially those east Asian
6 presenting that have been targeted during this
7 pandemic.

8 And third, that the city's health system can
9 ensure that critical information gets to families in
10 the language they need. Of these, of course today we
11 will be focusing on the later. As Asian Americans
12 have the highest rate of linguistic isolation of any
13 group in the City at 42 percent with no one over the
14 age of 14 in that house speaking English well and 78
15 percent of our community being foreign born.

16 COVID-19 has highlighted the barriers, the most
17 marginalized Asian American faced to language access.
18 The mere availability of languages is not enough
19 without effective outreach and implementation of
20 language access policies, preventing vital
21 communication about school decisions and the pandemic
22 from reaching the community.

23 The delay of disseminating in general lack of in
24 language information about the pandemic including the
25 social distancing guidelines has led to a higher risk

1
2 of exposure to the virus for the most vulnerable in
3 our community. This egregious gap in language access
4 has led to our communities to rely once again upon
5 the community based organizations who serve them in
6 the absence of proper resources by the City, as CBO's
7 continue to act as interpreters and crowd source
8 translated materials regarding even the most basic of
9 information on the pandemic.

10 Outreach to the most marginalized pockets of the
11 community must be prioritized. Without it their
12 health and very lives are endangered if they are
13 unable to communicate with their healthcare
14 providers, their schools and City agencies.

15 Our communities are consistently overlooked in
16 the distribution of resources which is harmful to us
17 as well as other communities of color who are denied
18 the same resources due to the perceived success of
19 APA's. This pandemic has highlighted a myriad of
20 holes in our City's safety net system and the City's
21 response must address root problem in addition to
22 immediate needs.

23 Our community will continue to suffer every day
24 we allow these flaws to exist in the system. As
25

1
2 always, CACF will continue to be available as a
3 resource and partner to address these concerns.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

5 HALLIE YEE: I look forward to working with you
6 to better address our communities needs. Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
8 I will now turn it over to Chair Menchaca for any
9 questions.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you for this panel
11 and the really kind of drill down of experiences that
12 we are hearing from many New Yorkers who are not
13 connecting to vital services. Everything from
14 housing and the affordable housing application
15 process is already hard in one language, of course it
16 is going to be even more difficult to do in multiple
17 languages but it is imperative that it happens
18 because any access that our New Yorkers don't have is
19 a detriment to a persons life. And so, all of things
20 are just so important, not just to listen to but to
21 put on the record.

22 And so, you heard from the Administration that
23 they are going to sit down with us and talk through
24 some of that and so, let's keep doing that work
25

1
2 together and I want to just say thank you and I hope
3 you have a good and safe Thanksgiving weekend.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. Seeing no
5 other Council Member questions, we will be moving
6 onto our next public panel. I would like to now
7 welcome Angelica Lara to testify. After Angelica
8 Lara, we will be hearing from Ana Guilcatanda.

9 Angelica Lara, you may begin when you are ready.

10 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11 ANGELICA LARA: Thank you. Good afternoon. My
12 name is Angelica Lara and I am the Education and
13 Outreach Director of UnLocal. UnLocal is a community-
14 centered non-profit organization that provides direct
15 community education, outreach and legal
16 representation to New York City's undocumented
17 immigrant communities. Since going remote in March,
18 our Education and Outreach team has hosted 47 remote
19 outreach events on immigration policy changes and
20 enforcement, Covid-19-related information, the census
21 and how to protect your rights.

22 We have deep connections with NYC immigrant
23 communities and partnerships with over 140 community-
24 based organizations and schools. Our legal team
25 handles complicated immigration matters for

1
2 immigrants from Latin America, Africa, the Middle
3 East, Asia, Europe and the Caribbean. The majority
4 of our clients are Black indigenous people of color
5 and have limited English proficiency.

6 We welcome this opportunity to address the issue
7 of language access and how it impacts the delivery of
8 emergency preparedness information for immigrant New
9 Yorkers. UnLocal relies on the speed, accuracy and
10 availability of translations of materials and updates
11 created by New York City agencies as we are routinely
12 disseminating their information to the public.

13 During COVID, updates in accessible languages are a
14 top priority for our community members. We are
15 grateful for our partnership with MOIA for the past
16 two years that enables us to provide its Know Your
17 Rights presentation materials to the public.

18 We are hopeful that, going forward, any policy
19 updates to these materials will be translated into
20 languages other than English before they are released
21 to enable our teams to deliver the information as
22 quickly and efficiently as possible to immigrant
23 communities. We urge, we urge the City to extend its
24 language access resources to include the translation
25 of materials into indigenous languages. As COVID

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2 relief programs develop, we continue to see the
3 undocumented people are left out despite the fact
4 that so many of them make up New York City's
5 essential workforce.

6 Rent relief must be expanded and extended. Small
7 business grants must be revamped and made accessible
8 to immigrant business owners. All webinars must be
9 held in such a way that makes them accessible to
10 those who speak languages other than English. Not
11 having access to resources and information that you
12 can understand has a profoundly negative impact on
13 people's wellbeing and it has a direct correlation on
14 health, housing stability, food access and mental
15 health.

16 To be able to truly call ourselves a sanctuary
17 city, we must provide accessible information to our
18 immigrant communities and include them in our
19 emergency preparedness planning process, both as
20 decision-makers and beneficiaries. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
23 I would like to now welcome Ana Guilcatanda to
24 testify. You may begin when you are ready.

25 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

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2 ANA GUILCATANDA: Good afternoon. My name is Ana
3 Guilcatanda, Staff Attorney in the Family and
4 Immigration Unit in Legal Services New York City.
5 Legal Services New York City's advocacy for the past
6 decade has led to language access improvements with
7 the NYPD, NYCHA and New York Courts.

8 About Local Law 30, although City agencies have
9 made efforts to implement it, they are not sharing
10 essential information in an effective and meaningful
11 ways. In many instances, immigrants cannot access
12 the information including emergency preparedness
13 plans during COVID-19 through the technological and
14 digital barriers.

15 This leaves immigrant communities in the dark and
16 unprotected during a time when they most need to
17 access city services. It is our clients who bear the
18 brunt of City agencies failure to meaningfully comply
19 with Local Law 30. Many of our clients could not
20 find COVID-19 testing sites using the City's
21 websites. Many families with young children did not
22 know how to sign up for snap benefits and did not
23 know which schools were providing grab and go meals.
24 Others cannot pay rent because of loss of income and
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1
2 continue to struggle under the weight of rental
3 arrears.

4 This is made worse because they cannot navigate
5 the HRA website. One client recently divorced and
6 has no financial support. She struggled to get HRA
7 benefits and the agency did not translate information
8 into Bengali for her, even though it is a current
9 language under Local Law 30.

10 We have the following recommendations. First, we
11 urge City agencies to use Executive Order 47 to
12 provide essential information to LEP communities by
13 using ethnic media platforms that specifically cater
14 to those communities.

15 Second, agencies must provide essential
16 information to LEP individuals in creative ways. For
17 instance, agencies should use informational videos
18 and short tutorials that LEP individuals can easily
19 access and share in multiple platforms.

20 Third, agencies should also consider the use of
21 social media platforms and networking sites come only
22 used by LEP individuals such as We Chat and Whats Up
23 to effectively convey essential information.

24 Fourth, City agencies must create emergency
25 preparedness and response plans, implement them

1
2 meaningfully and promptly in emergency circumstances
3 and make them accessible to LEP individuals in at
4 least the 10 designated City languages.

5 Thank you to the Committee's for providing us
6 with an opportunity to testify today.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
8 I would now like to turn it over to Council Member
9 Menchaca for any questions.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah thank you. Thank you
11 both for being here today and really with more
12 recommendations that are going to be part of how we
13 engage the City in the next few months as we both
14 look at resources i.e. putting something in the
15 budget or/and a new strategy that looks at Local or
16 Executive Orders and you just gave us some
17 interesting Executive Orders to really push other
18 opportunities and operational requests from the City
19 to support our essential workers and our immigrants
20 and I think maybe what I - maybe I will ask this
21 question because we are at the end and we have all
22 been listing to a lot of information and I still feel
23 like the advocates need to be driving the policy that
24 ends of being implemented because whatever the City
25 is doing right now, it's just not working and there

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is a lot of resources that are being put into time after all this communication and taskforce and how do we make it simple and I think that would you all commit to sitting down with us and really creating this action plan. This action plan that may include some Executive Orders. I don't know how amenable the Mayor's Office or the Mayor is going to be to putting in an Executive Order in the budget is going to be in negotiation.

All these pieces are still unclear but what can't be unclear is what is going to actually work. That has to be clear because if that's not clear than it is going to get lost and we can't afford that to get lost.

Will you commit to being part of this conversation?

ANA GUILCATANDA Yes, we definitely commit to being part of the conversation.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, wonderful thank you. Happy Thanksgiving, is this the full panel Harbani?

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yes.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, thank you to this panel. Happy Thanksgiving, I hope it is safe and

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2 that you are taking all the precautions but enjoying
3 yourselves and all the gratitude. Thank you.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. At this
5 point we have concluded public testimony. If we have
6 inadvertently missed anyone that is registered to
7 testify today and has yet to be called, please use
8 the Zoom raise hand function now and you will be
9 called on in the order that your hand has been
10 raised.

11 Seeing no hands, I am going to turn it back to
12 Chair Menchaca for closing remarks.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Well, I want to thank
14 everyone for being here today. Our Chair Cabrera and
15 I and all the members of the Committee who were here
16 to listen to the testimony of our first public panel,
17 hear some responses from MOIA, the Mayor's Office of
18 Immigrant Affairs and other City agencies and their
19 commitment to sit down with us and figure this out.
20 We are not looking for a sense of compliance for the
21 sake of compliance. What we are looking for is the
22 transformation about a City who is a sanctuary – who
23 is struggling to become a sanctuary City, let's be
24 real, can actually put the resources and effort and
25 strategy so that we can solve these issues in the

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time of COVID. And economic downturn is critical for the livelihood of this City and I keep saying this over and over again, under so many other pieces of legislation that we need to pass in the City, that the economy of the City of New York is an immigrant economy and that economy has families that are connected to it and education resources that are needed and food and hunger issues and health and all these things that are really important that the City has for its New Yorkers and when it is not accessible, that is unacceptable in the deepest kind of way as a municipal service organization like the City of New York. So, we need to solve that.

I will say the following thing is more of an ask. The City last year was confronted with a budget crisis and the City Council Members were doing their — we did our best and we know that it wasn't good enough. And so, maybe we can offer some ideas on how to think about funding this series of initiatives that can actually solve the problems and really build a peoples budget, a budget that comes from all of you who understand what needs to happen and really bring that to us in the clearest way. And that's the work

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2 that we will do right after this hearing is over. We
3 will follow up and let's start to work.

4 Thank you to my staff.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Chair Menchaca, I am sorry to
6 interrupt, we have one person who did raise their
7 hand.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Good, okay.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I would like to quickly call
10 on Cindy Liang to testify. You may begin when you
11 are ready.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

13 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

14 MEZEDA UDDIN: Hi, thank you all. My name is -
15 because she left it with me, my name Mezeda Uddin
16 from the Co-Founder. Hi, Carlos, how are you?

17 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Good, good to see you.
18 Thank you for being here today.

19 MEZEDA UDDIN: Long time.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes.

21 MEZEDA UDDIN: We are very proud of you. You are
22 with us always from the beginning to last.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, thank you.

24 MEZEDA UDDIN: For our immigrants and that is why
25 I am here today. Cindy left because it took so long

1
2 time. Cindy gave it to me and said that, can I send
3 my testimony or otherwise you can say [INAUDIBLE
4 2:45:07] and can I testify? It is to this issue.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes, please.

6 MEZEDA UDDIN: I am from the South Asian
7 Committee and it is very lacking that we are not
8 getting as Fund now as the immigrants we are not
9 treated well as fund now. In the City pandemic
10 times, that is a serious issue and I can testify now.
11 My name is Mezeda Uddin, I am the Co-Founder of the
12 South Asian Fund for the Education Scholarship and
13 Training.

14 The South Asian are providing immigrants needs
15 since 2015. We have delivered a comprehensive array
16 of services to thousands of immigrants. Children,
17 youth, adults and adults and they are Pakistan,
18 Afghanistan, Maldives, Bhutan, India and all South
19 Asian communities in the New York City area.

20 Thank you for giving me an opportunity to speak
21 about our language access issues that many, many of
22 the South Asian families are facing today. As a
23 SAFEST representative, my team have first-hand
24 understanding of challenges that our communities face
25 on a daily basis.

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2 Since the start of COVID-19, many of our South
3 Asian communities have lost their battle due to the
4 reasons such as, overcrowding apartments shared by
5 multi-generations and the lack of information on how
6 to protect themselves against the virus. Many of our
7 South Asian students have suffered inequity in
8 education because their parents speak little or no
9 English and could not help them with school work.

10 And moreover, due to the lack of job security and
11 lack of income, many, mostly women and children have
12 been suffering from mental depression and physical
13 abuse silently.

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

15 MAZEDA UDDIN: Since March, SAFEST has worked
16 overtime to help the community dealing with the loss,
17 including assisting funeral arrangements and finding
18 shelters to battered women and the children. But we
19 feel that New York could do more bridging the
20 language barrier gap for our communities. Here are a
21 list of issues our immigrant communities encountered:
22 MTA billboard sign.

23 In the beginning of COVID-19 pandemic, the MTA
24 posted signs to remind people the proper way to put
25 on a mask. While we appreciate MTA's effort to

1
2 inform Bengali speaking riders, some of the signs
3 were translated incorrectly and created confusion to
4 the writers. This is one confusion. After several
5 communication with the Corey Johnson office, City
6 Council office and the Assemblyman office, finally
7 Corey Johnson solved that problem. MTA has to be has
8 to have any language translator, especially in
9 Bengali, in Bengali community in the New York and
10 city level. If any have the problem translating,
11 please, SAFEST organization is volunteering to solve
12 that translation before you publish, before you
13 transfer, before you reach and board even board of
14 election, even board of Ed, even board in the
15 community [INAUDIBLE 1:49:25]. That is one problem.
16 Another problem is the 911 issue, that 311 issue.

17 Since the start of COVID-19 pandemic, SAFEST has
18 made numerous 311 calls to request GetFoodNYC
19 Emergency Home Food Delivery help on behalf of our
20 community members. They are our most vulnerable
21 population in our communities, they are the ones who
22 cannot go or to make it outside, have no one who can
23 help them get the food and I call them personally,
24 personally I call them because they could not speak
25 English, they could not understand what number they

1
2 can dial to get their proper language then I helped
3 them, over 300 people to call them. Every time when
4 I called the 311, they said ma'am, why you keep
5 calling? And I said that they could not speak
6 English. I need to help them to get the food. And
7 they said, no, tell them to call. Then I told them
8 to call, they said that we cannot call because
9 English speaking. Then I called them, keep calling,
10 those are the people who are not getting their food
11 because using I am using my personal money to buy SIM
12 card for my call line that I call them 311 give their
13 food. And this is one issue.

14 And then another issue is 911. Two are the
15 victim, one is Brooklyn, one is [INAUDIBLE 2:51:10].
16 One of the victim called for domestic victims. She
17 called from the Bronx home to get her help for 911.
18 When she called, her husband next to her to listening
19 to everything. Then when she started walking, her
20 husband took the phone from her. She could not get
21 help and 911 did not call back her.

22 Then another in the Queens happened that oh my
23 God, I can cry now. And then another incident
24 happened. So she called 911 but she tried to speak
25 [INAUDIBLE 2:51:56]. 911 did not give her a

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2 translator. 911 did not even call back to her,
3 finally I put him shelter in because New York City
4 does not have enough space for the women's shelter.
5 This is another serious issue.

6 Then another issue is DOE, that vote on Ed. This
7 is serious issue; everybody has to work for this DOE
8 because this is our education system. If our
9 education system is broken, that means we are not
10 belong to in this country. No education, no future.

11 Number one problem is DOE submit a wrong class
12 session in their old side. Many times I tried to
13 reach them to solve this problem is voluntarily to
14 correct the language, review the language. Even the
15 EBT card, there is no reason Bengali translation is
16 their to help to connect. How to get the help.

17 Different people called me to help the bilinguals
18 because personal information, they cannot share with
19 anyone. Even though I called. Okay, every phone
20 number is saved everywhere, okay, especially my
21 number, Carlos, you know me better. Okay, then I
22 tried to use different SIM card by the different
23 people in front of them. It is COVID-19, I could not
24 reach everyone to get their help.
25

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2 Then another issue is laptop issue. Another
3 issue is iPod issue. There has to be somehow getting
4 help from the bilingual especially LAP problem. I am
5 also interpreter in New York City. Different
6 department, housing, Board of Ed, judicial,
7 everywhere I am the interpreter for the bilinguals
8 and many people are suffering for the right help.
9 Even so many people are caught up somehow because of
10 bilingual problem. Even their [INAUDIBLE 2:54:21].
11 They are caught by misguided direction. Those are
12 things that have to be corrected and the iPad, so
13 many students are not getting iPad yet. They are
14 missing their homework. They are not getting the
15 proper direction even internet service is so poor.
16 All of us are in some of the student to working with
17 the remote program to the children who could not even
18 get the next class. They couldn't not even finish
19 what teachers say. Even parent could not help
20 because of LAP. They could not even go to the
21 peoples account to check if the children are doing
22 good or failing. I am getting from my home every
23 day, seven to twelve phone to missing the homework.
24 The child is not connected with the children. Child
25 is not finishing their homework because of LAP

1
2 problem; they could not solve this problem. Those
3 parents are begging to the teacher, helping – from
4 the teachers to help the parent's guide but because
5 of LAP, because of today, I picked up seven calls.
6 Five of them missing homework and that missing
7 homework and parent is begging me, I am an
8 interpreter, begging me to tell them. I can't be on
9 the line while teacher is helping the children. That
10 has to be solved.

11 And then another problem, another request I am
12 getting, while children are doing the homework,
13 rather they are playing the video games and not
14 finishing the homework. How do they control the
15 parent in some way, they have the control while they
16 have the student in their remote program?

17 This issue has to be solved.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes.

19 MAZEDA UDDIN: The school from the DOE has to be
20 giving them laptop to blocking any of the websites,
21 only the school facility while they are in each
22 students, while they are enrolling the remote class.
23 That has to be taken care of this. Otherwise,
24 children are failing. Children are not getting help
25 from the teacher because of the teachers are not

1 Bengali. Most of the teachers are not bilingual and
2 that needs to be helped for our minority children.
3 This is a serious issue. Our New York City education
4 system is falling apart. Let me tell you, we have to
5 stand up. I think Carlos, you are the Immigrants and
6 you understand what our immigrants need. Thank you.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank you so
9 much Mazeda for this incredible testimony that you
10 have brought from the community and so much of it you
11 are holding and so, I just want to say thank you for
12 holding that. That is a lot to hold for one person
13 but I know that you are doing everything you can
14 right now to support our young people, our parents
15 and education and hunger, in 911 calls and domestic
16 violence. These are all things that the City is
17 ready to support our communities and what you are
18 exposing is the fact that the system breaks down and
19 people are left behind and that is wrong, that is
20 wrong.

21 And so, we want to follow up with you, so make
22 sure that our team has all of your information
23 because I want to sit down with you and really look
24 at some of the things that could be solved
25 immediately and some of those things are going to be

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2 more structure issues, like the Department of
3 Education issue, with a translator being on the phone
4 with homework help and if they are not allowing that
5 to happen, we have got to look at how to solve that
6 issue. And it sounds like there are other, I see
7 some Zoom nods, that people are saying, yeah, that's
8 an issue. We need to solve that and the way that you
9 solve that is by talking about and bringing voice to
10 it and you did that today. And so, I want to say
11 thank you for that.

12 And so, with that, just make sure that you leave
13 all your contact information so that our team can
14 follow up and really say thank you. I am glad that
15 you signed up and you spoke today. It makes me feel
16 good and we are going to work on this together.

17 MEZEDA UDDIN: Thank you Carlos, your help is
18 more helpful and my office trying to do a hard job.
19 DOE trying to do hard job but some has to be spoken
20 up. Someone has to bring this issue to the table, so
21 that our children can you know, I sleep almost
22 everyday around 2 a.m. because I try to help to the
23 parents to guide how to go to Zoom. The parent
24 doesn't know how to use the Zoom. That is another
25 problem, okay and because of the language barrier.

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And then another thing, half of the parents say that they don't know what their children is doing. Whether they finished the homework or whether they are playing the video games or they did not finish - even some of the children are hiding themselves, not showing the parents how children understand that they don't finish. And one parent just told me a couple of minutes ago, said that every day I saw him on the computer but I don't know what he is doing.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah.

MEZEDA UDDIN: You understand because of LAP, language barrier, education, that has to be solved. But thank you for giving me the opportunity to come here today to speak out and this issue is a serious issue. Somehow, I think we need to be clear and planning, we are planning to at least volunteer community to involve with the school policy. To giving opportunity to volunteer through the parents to finish the homework in part with the children. I think that would be good for that and I am really glad I am here today and I think I should be involved with the Immigrant Advisory Board, Advocacy Board so that I can bring issues to the table, so that I can

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2 solve individually all the volunteer teams to parents
3 guide.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: I love that idea and I am
5 going to support that. I am going to support that
6 and I think everybody who showed up at this hearing
7 today, I want to send a message to all of you to
8 let's convene and I don't know if you know Aracelis
9 in the Bronx and Alexandra Lee who is here as well,
10 listening to you, giving us a lot of feedback with
11 their head nodding and saying yeah, they are in
12 solidarity with you, that we are going to do this
13 together.

14 And so, thank you again for your time today, for
15 spending that time and I know that there is a
16 Thanksgiving holiday and let us move into that
17 holiday with a sense of gratitude for each other and
18 the partnership that we have here to make some big
19 changes in our City that are necessary.

20 MAZEDA UDDIN: Thank you, thank you. We can help
21 and build the best community. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: We are going to do
23 everything we can, thank you.

24 MEZEDA UDDIN: Thank you. See you again.
25

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL OPERATIONS

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2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And with that, I am going
3 to close this hearing. [GAVEL] Thank you all for
4 coming.

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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 December 18, 2020