

**Testimony before the
New York City Council
Committee on Criminal Justice and Finance
Chair Sandy Nurse
Chair Justin Brannan**

**By
Francis Torres, First Deputy Commissioner
NYC Department of Correction**

May 27, 2025

Good morning, Chair Nurse and Chair Brannan, and members of the Committees on Criminal Justice and Finance. I am Francis Torres, First Deputy Commissioner of the New York City Department of Correction (“Department” or “DOC”). My colleagues and I are here to discuss the Department’s Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2026 and what lies ahead for the agency in the coming fiscal year.

When Lynelle Maginley-Liddie was appointed Commissioner, she committed herself to leading this agency under the guiding principles of service, compassion, and respect, so that both staff and people in custody have their voices uplifted and feel safe in our jails. She has made it clear to staff on all levels that she expects the same from them, and they have delivered, no matter the challenges we are facing. Most recently, the Department has experienced an unexpected increase in its census, driven in large part by the New York State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision temporarily suspending intake of state-ready individuals due to the wildcat strike. Today, we have over 7,600 individuals in custody, compared to

approximately 6,300 this time last year. In contrast, we have approximately 5,900 uniformed members of service to manage the jails and other critical operations, compared to over 6,200 last year. Despite this, dedicated staff across all divisions have risen to the call and, throughout this challenge, we have ensured that all people coming into in our care have a bed and can be safely housed. During this period, important violence indicators have continued to trend downward. We continue to collaborate with partners throughout the criminal justice system to ensure people in custody are moving expeditiously through the court process and are not lingering in our custody longer than they should.

Our Commissioner has said it before and I will say it on her behalf this morning, heroes work here at the New York City Department of Correction. We remain laser focused on recruiting and supporting staff to do this challenging and important work. In March of this year, over 100 new recruits graduated from the DOC Academy and became part of the Boldest family, and we have a new Academy class starting at the end of this week. Last week, we held an exam for Correction Captains and hope to promote dedicated members of service into critical, front-line leadership positions, where they will support and mentor correction officers and help shape the culture of our agency. Our Commissioner has stated repeatedly that leadership matters; all promotional classes for supervisors have several leadership development components built into the curriculum, with a servant leadership focus as a foundation for all leadership development within the agency. It's incredibly important that we foster the next generation of correctional leaders, to carry the important work of reform forward for decades to come.

At the beginning of this month, we celebrated National Correctional Officers and Employees week. As part of the celebrations and in furtherance of our efforts to support our

staff, we opened four additional wellness centers to promote more opportunities for them to focus on their wellbeing, recharge, and show up as their best selves. It is imperative that we uplift and honor the dedicated public servants who give so much of themselves to keep our city safe, not just for one week, but each and every day.

Finally, before turning to the budget, we would like to highlight several exciting initiatives that are coming to fruition in the next fiscal year. We have been working diligently to meaningfully expand programs and services in critical areas, which were chosen based on a number of factors, but most importantly input from people in custody and our staff. Providers have been selected, and we anticipate an announcement soon with services beginning in the coming weeks. We are also looking forward to rolling out the Lightning Law discovery sharing platform. Lightning Law will allow for efficient and confidential sharing of records between clients and their attorneys through electronic devices. We are hopeful that this technological innovation will support speedier case processing and better justice outcomes, which benefits everyone. We are procuring a new virtual visitation platform aimed at improving the visit process for attorneys and those visiting their loved ones in the jails. This new platform will allow attorneys to more easily schedule virtual meetings with incarcerated clients and discuss case updates. These measures will help modernize our jails, provide better access to critical services, and ultimately improve outcomes for those who are in our care.

The Department's Fiscal Year 2026 Executive Budget

Now we will briefly turn to the fiscal year 2026 Executive Budget. As of the fiscal year 2026 Executive Financial Plan, the Department's budget is \$1.3 billion. The vast majority of this – 87 percent – is allocated for Personal Services, and 13 percent for Other than Personal Services.

The fiscal year 2026 Executive Budget increased by \$288 million compared to fiscal year 2025 Adopted budget of \$1.0 billion. Some of the increases to the Executive Budget include:

- Federal grant funding for the Bureau of Justice Assistance Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Use Site-Based Program. With allowances of \$10 thousand in fiscal year 2025, an additional \$586 thousand in fiscal year 2026, and \$340 thousand in fiscal year 2027 respectively, this grant will help expand substance misuse services for the Department's high-risk, high-needs population through the addition of five substance misuse counselors.
- We received an additional \$1 million baselined funding beginning in fiscal year 2026 for Lightning Law.
- Also in fiscal year 2026, we received \$1.4 million dollars for the virtual visitation web-based platform that will improve virtual visits.

Capital Funding

The fiscal year 2025 Executive Capital Commitment Plan totals \$14.6 billion, which covers Fiscal Years 2025 through 2035. As of the fiscal year 2026 Executive Financial Plan, most of the capital funding is tied to the borough-based jails program which totals \$13.9 billion over the ten-year plan and is allocated as follows:

- Brooklyn Facility - \$2.3 billion
- Manhattan Facility - \$4.1 billion
- Bronx Facility - \$3.1 billion
- Queens Facility - \$4 billion

Headcount

We continue to work diligently to attract and retain both civilian and uniformed staff. The total authorized headcount is 8,810, which includes 7,060 uniformed positions and 1,750 civilian positions. Our actual uniformed staffing levels remain well below our authorized headcount and the Department plans to use the new needs approved for recruitment and advertising in the Preliminary Budget to aggressively advertise and utilize marketing strategies to promote recruitment. We continue to welcome the council's support promoting job opportunities within their networks.

Conclusion

As we look to the year ahead, we celebrate the heroes that work at the Department. When we think of a hero, we think of someone who is courageous and selfless, someone who puts others' needs before their own. That's what a hero does; that's who correction officers are. They are the backbone of our collective achievements over the past 130 years, and they will continue to be a powerful force for hope and transformation in the years to come.

Over the past fiscal year, we have made progress in spite of our many challenges, because that's what the Boldest do. The work we do is difficult, and yet crucial. It is vital to this city. Commissioner Maginley-Liddie, our team, and I, and all the heroes that work alongside us, remain committed to this important work. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My colleagues and I are available to answer your questions.

NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

**Executive Budget Hearing
Before The New York City Council
Committee on Immigration**

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

May 27, 2025

Thank you to Chair Aviles and Chair Brannan and the Committee on Immigration and the Committee on Finance for holding this budget hearing.

My name is Manuel Castro, and I serve as Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. I'm joined today by Jasniya Sanchez, Deputy Commissioner of Administration and Strategic Initiatives, and Lorena Lucero, Deputy Commissioner of Programs and Policy.

A Message to the Community

Before I begin, I want to speak directly to our city's immigrant communities:

In Spanish:

Sé que este es un momento difícil. Sé que muchos sienten miedo, miedo de ser separados de sus seres queridos, miedo de tener que dejar el lugar que ahora llaman hogar, o incluso miedo de simplemente ser vistos.

Yo también sentí ese miedo. Crucé la frontera cuando tenía apenas cinco años y crecí indocumentado en esta ciudad. Sé lo que es tratar de construir una vida mientras se vive con incertidumbre todos los días.

Por eso quiero tomar un momento para decirles esto claro y directo: Como lo han escuchado del Alcalde y de los líderes de nuestra ciudad, sigan accediendo a todos los servicios de la ciudad sin miedo.

- *De parte de la Canciller de Educación: Continúen enviando a sus hijos a la escuela.*
- *De parte de la Comisionada de la Policía: Si son testigos o víctimas de un crimen, llamen al 911.*

- *De parte del Presidente de Health + Hospitals y de la Comisionada del Departamento de Salud e Higiene Mental: Busquen atención médica en nuestros hospitales públicos cuando lo necesiten.*

En esta ciudad cuenta con personas, servidores públicos, educadores, trabajadores de salud y vecinos, que se preocupan profundamente por su seguridad y su futuro.

Estos no son solo servicios. Son sus derechos. Y están aquí para ustedes.

Sobre todo, no pierdan la fe. No pierdan la esperanza. Vivan su vida. Y no dejen que el miedo gane.

In English:

I know this is a difficult time. I know many are feeling fear, fear of being separated from loved ones, fear of having to leave the place that is now your home, or even fear of simply being seen.

I've felt that fear myself. I crossed the border as a five-year-old, and I grew up undocumented in this city. I know what it's like to try to build a life while carrying uncertainty every single day.

So I want to take a moment to say this to you clearly and directly: As you've heard from the Mayor and from our city's leadership: keep accessing all city services without fear.

- *As you've heard from the Schools Chancellor: Continue to send your children to school.*
- *From the Police Commissioner: If you witness or experience a crime, call 911.*
- *From the President of the Health + Hospitals system and the Commissioner of the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: Seek medical care at our public hospitals and city administers programs when you need it.*

And I could go on and on because this city has people, public servants, educators, healthcare workers, your neighbors, who care deeply about your safety and your future.

Most importantly, don't lose faith. Don't lose hope. Continue to live your life. And don't let fear win.

Overview

Let me begin with a brief overview of where we stand.

I'm glad to share that all of MOIA's funding is preserved in the Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2026 and we are entering the new fiscal year with a proposed budget of approximately \$29.6 million, the largest budget since the office was created.

This budget allows us to continue strengthening MOIA's programs and infrastructure across key pillars: Immigration Legal and Support Services, English Language Learning, Language Access, Community Engagement, and Communications.

We will build on three and a half years of sustained, mission-driven work, during which MOIA has delivered more services than at any other time in its history, while responding to multiple crises affecting immigrant communities. During this time, we've significantly expanded access to immigration legal and support services, English classes, language support, and more. We've also managed a record number of contracts with immigrant-serving nonprofits, ensuring that our efforts remain deeply rooted in the community.

Legal and Support Services

MOIA aims to use its funding in the most strategic way to meet the emerging needs of immigrant communities.

On immigration legal services, in FY26 we are working to a) establish our new MOIA immigration legal support centers and b) extend contracts for existing legal providers.

We are on track to launching the "MOIA Immigration Legal Support Centers" initiative for Fiscal Year 26 by July 1st. This initiative is a \$6.4 million annually funded program that will support 25 immigrant serving nonprofit contractors to provide culturally and linguistically responsive immigration legal support.

In addition, we are extending existing contracts with immigration legal service providers through FY26 and incorporating them into our MOIA Centers model.

This new model represents an evolution of ActionNYC and past approaches. It incorporates changes that meet the current and emerging needs of city's immigrant communities and places services directly in immigrant neighborhoods.

We will also continue to operate the MOIA Immigration Legal Support Hotline, in partnership with Catholic Charities. In 2024 alone, the hotline received over 64,000 calls, connecting immigrant New Yorkers to consultations and trusted referrals.

English Learning

Another cornerstone of our work is English language instruction.

Our MOIA English Learning program, run in partnership with New York City's three public library systems, currently offers English classes at nearly 60 branches and community centers across the city.

During my tenure, we developed a comprehensive, beginner-level curriculum that has been widely requested by both advocates and learners and was missing from the curriculum. Now, the curriculum is available for all levels of proficiency, not only teaches English, but connects immigrants to city resources and services, helping them

navigate life in New York City with greater confidence and independence.

Language Access

As with previous years, language access remains a key priority for MOIA.

Over the last several years, we've worked hard to build an in-house team of experts that now provide translation and interpretation services for mayoral offices and technical assistance to over 45 City agencies, helping them comply with Local Law 30 and meaningfully expand language access across city government.

In April, we launched the "I Speak" campaign as part of Immigrant Heritage Week, encouraging all New Yorkers to request services in the language they're most comfortable with—and reminding agencies of their obligation to provide it.

Community Engagement

Community engagement remains at the heart of our work, as we seek to be an office deeply rooted in community.

In 2025 alone, MOIA's External Affairs and Outreach team has made more than 10,000 direct touchpoints with immigrant New Yorkers through: Resource fairs, Tabling, Know Your Rights presentations, Days of Action, Canvassing, and our AskMOIA email and hotline.

We also launched the "Know Your Rights for Immigrant New Yorkers" campaign across more than 4,000 LinkNYC digital screens, ensuring that accurate, multilingual information is reaching communities citywide.

Communications

In a time of uncertainty and misinformation, MOIA's communications efforts help ensure immigrant New Yorkers receive information from trusted messengers in their own languages.

For example, in recent months, we partnered with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene for a multilingual media roundtable on healthcare access, and collaborated with the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, the Commission on Human Rights, and the Mayor's Public Engagement Unit for a press briefing on housing rights.

These events drew over 46 ethnic and community media outlets, with coverage in Chinese, Urdu, Korean, Tagalog, Arabic, Spanish, Bangla, and more. Combined, these stories received over one million impressions, directly reaching immigrant audiences with timely and accurate information.

Conclusion

Lastly, I want to thank the many public servants, across agencies and offices, who

continue to show up for immigrant New Yorkers.

I'm proud of what we've accomplished together. And I remain committed to ensuring New York City remains a national model for immigrant services and opportunity.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

**STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE
MAY 27, 2025**

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chairs Nurse and Brannan and the members of the Committees on Criminal Justice and Finance for holding this hearing.

We should start by stating the obvious: the future of Rikers Island, and exactly what role the city and the yet-to-be-appointed remediation manager will play in its operation is uncertain. Further, it is clear that the city will not be able to close Rikers Island by its legally mandated closure date in 2027. Despite the urgent humanitarian crisis on Rikers Island, the Adams administration has sat on its hands for most of its tenure, allowing the dysfunction in the jails to spiral and the death toll to rise. In fact, Mayor Adams is reportedly considering abandoning the plan to close Rikers altogether, a move that would blatantly go against city law.¹ As of today, the population in New York City jails is 7,613 people.² This far exceeds the required population of a maximum of just over 4,000 people to transition to the proposed borough-based jails once they are constructed.

These proposed borough-based jails would allow people to remain closer to their communities, increasing incarcerated people's contact with loved ones and their attorneys, as well as giving them greater access to treatment and rehabilitative programming. I hear community concerns that the presence of a jail will increase crime in the surrounding neighborhood, but we already have other, smaller correctional facilities around our city, and there is no evidence that these facilities increase crime in the neighborhoods in which they are located. In fact, some residents have reported that they barely notice their presence.³

In order to lower the city's incarcerated population, we should be investing in pre-trial non-incarceral services and alternatives to incarceration, so fewer people enter Rikers Island in the first place. Court backlogs, slow processing of cases, and the recent disruption to transfers to upstate prison as a result of the wildcat strike earlier this year also contributes to the rising population—detainees spent an average of 101 days in the jails in FY 2024,⁴ three times the

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<https://www.nydailynews.com/2025/05/02/mayor-adams-exploring-abandon-plan-shut-down-rikers-island/>

2 <https://nyc-jail-population-tracker.datacollaborativeforjustice.org/>

3

<https://citylimits.org/2018/07/17/the-jail-next-door-a-look-at-the-14-correctional-facilities-in-new-yorks-neighorhoods/>

4 <https://www.vitalcitynyc.org/articles/the-state-of-new-york-citys-jails-year-end-2024>

national average.⁵ This fact is unacceptable. Across the city’s jails, around 85 percent of people are just waiting for their cases to conclude,⁶ and their sentences ultimately may require less jail time than what they served waiting for their cases to resolve. The population on Rikers has become so inflated that DOC is housing cisgender men in the Rose M. Singer Center, which typically only houses women and transgender people, resulting in a more heavily restricted life for all housed in this facility. Though the Adams administration is arresting and sending more people to Rikers Island—and the new crackdown on low-level, quality-of-life infractions will only exacerbate this issue—this bloated length of stay is a large factor in the ballooning population.⁷

Instead of focusing on combating recidivism and idleness through programming and services, the Adams administration has made several back-and-forth funding cuts and restorations to programming that gives both providers and incarcerated people whiplash. In 2023, the mayor cut \$17 million in outside contracts with non-profit organizations that provided a range of services and programming; claiming DOC staff could provide these same services in-house. When it became apparent that it could not, the mayor restored \$14 million in funding last year. Now, the administration has earmarked \$13 million for four outside contracts for new services.⁸ While I am happy to hear about the new RFP, the people who desperately need these services have experienced disruptions to programming; for example, there were 4,100 fewer group “facilitation sessions” for detainees over the first four months of FY 2024, compared to the same period the prior year.⁹ While it is incarcerated people who suffer in the short term, in the long run, all of our communities suffer when we are not doing everything we can to ensure that, when a person is released, they are not rearrested.

Holding one person in jail on Rikers Island costs \$400,000 annually¹⁰—one of the most expensive jail systems in the country—yet the conditions in the jails remain abysmal. Being incarcerated takes a significant toll on a person’s physical and mental health, and many people on Rikers Island have complex health needs that require specialized care. There is a significant shortage of health staff, often with only one healthcare professional making rounds in multiple units. This harms not only the health of the people incarcerated, as the stress of trying to provide quality care to so many people with little support and inadequate pay is directly leading to staff burnout and turnover, as well as recruitment issues. Rikers Island is the largest mental health services provider in NYC, and one of the largest in the country. More than half of the population at Rikers has a mental health diagnosis, with 16 percent having a serious mental illness.¹¹ In Q3 of FY 2024, detainees were actually seen at just over half of all scheduled medical and mental health appointments, with zero percent of these no-shows a verified result of a refusal to attend.¹² This is completely unacceptable. Healthcare is a basic human right, and we have all seen what

⁵ <https://bjs.ojp.gov/web-report/jail-inmates-2023-statistical-tables>

⁶ <https://greaterjusticenyc.org/nycjail/>

⁷ <https://www.vitalcitynyc.org/articles/the-state-of-new-york-citys-jails-year-end-2024>

⁸ <https://www.thecity.nyc/2025/03/07/rikers-to-bring-back-nonprofits/>

⁹ <https://www.thecity.nyc/2025/03/07/rikers-to-bring-back-nonprofits/>

¹⁰

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b6de4731aef1de914f43628/t/67dd7c6d4e5dca1fa86db6d8/1742568562268/Independent+Rikers+Commission+Blueprint+to+Close+Rikers+Island+March+2025.pdf>

¹¹ https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2022/2022_mmr.pdf

¹² <https://www.vitalcitynyc.org/articles/the-state-of-new-york-citys-jails-year-end-2024>

can happen when a person in DOC custody does not receive appropriate and timely medical attention.

Mayor Adams has recently made a series of extremely concerning decisions to embrace Donald Trump's xenophobic agenda, including allowing First Deputy Mayor Randy Mastro to sign a dubiously legal executive order allowing ICE to open an office on Rikers Island. I cannot overstate how harmful this would be not only for people incarcerated on Rikers, but for our communities: in addition to making detainees more vulnerable to coercion and trapping them in a never-ending cycle of detention, it would make it more difficult to resolve criminal cases should ICE not produce an individual in their custody for court.¹³ Thankfully, a judge has blocked ICE from operating on Rikers—but only temporarily. This makes investing in communities to ensure people are never arrested in the first place all the more urgent, and it is now more important than ever to fully fund robust oversight of our jails.

For years, this administration has defunded oversight bodies in the city, including the Board of Correction, a nine-person, non-judicial oversight board that carries out independent oversight and enacts regulations to support safer, fairer, smaller, and more humane NYC jails. At a time when the administration is decreasing transparency, it is more important than ever that the BOC has enough staff to do its job. The preliminary budget supported only 30 authorized positions, three fewer than the 33 positions supposed by the FY25 budget. There are over 7,000 people in DOC custody, yet there are only 12 monitoring staff who conduct oversight in the jails, court pens, and hospital jail wards. It is unrealistic to expect 12 people to adequately oversee that many detainees, officers, and staff. The Board is requesting an additional \$2.3 million and 20 positions in FY26 than was allocated in the preliminary budget in order to fulfill its oversight responsibilities.

It is more important than ever for us to hold tightly to each other. It is more dangerous than ever for immigrant New Yorkers, regardless of their documentation status, to make contact with the criminal legal system, making it even more urgent to focus on decarceration, alternatives to incarceration, and investments in our communities.

Thank you.

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<https://www.bronxdefenders.org/the-adams-administration-is-allowing-ice-on-rikers-island-for-the-first-time-in-over-a-decade-if-we-dont-act-unfettered-deportations-will-be-the-result/>



**JUMAANE D.
WILLIAMS**

**STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON
IMMIGRATION
MAY 27, 2025**

Good Afternoon,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. Thank you very much Chairs Aviles and Brannan for holding today's hearing and allowing me the opportunity to provide a statement.

The situation for our city's immigrant New Yorkers is growing exponentially more dire. The mayor seems to have decided the safety of the city's immigrant community was a fair trade for his personal freedom from federal indictment. Trump's Border Czar Tom Homan, speaking on live television, said that if the mayor did not honor the demands of the Trump deportation regime, he would be "up [the mayor's] butt."¹

Since I last spoke at this committee, the mayor has: attempted to place a permanent ICE base of operations on Rikers Island, collaborated with the Trump administration's most dangerous officials, and slashed the Asylum Application Help Center from the city's budget.^{2,3,4} While assisting in these attacks, the mayor deflects blame for the deterioration of immigrant services on Albany and the need for more state funds.

The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) is underfunded and largely silent. Meanwhile, the Office of Asylum Seeker Operations is being dissolved without a proper surrogate. Yet, the city still has more than two billion state-funded dollars that have not been properly spent.⁵ This kind of smoke-and-mirror budget maneuver is the result of either personal conviction or gross mismanagement — neither are acceptable.

¹

<https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/justice-department/trumps-border-czar-tells-eric-adams-butt-nyc-mayor-breaks-vow-help-ice-rcna192201>

² <https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/50-002/executive-order-50>

³

<https://nypost.com/2025/03/05/opinion/how-eric-adams-and-kristi-noem-are-fighting-the-good-fight-on-illegal-migrants-vs-delusional-dems/>

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/16/nyregion/nyc-migrants-legal-help-ending.html>

⁵ Ibid.



**JUMAANE D.
WILLIAMS**

The most essential need today is comprehensive legal services. These services are now the main line of defense against Donald Trump's racist deportation regime. I once again call on the Mayor and the City Council to allocate the \$33 million needed for the three New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP) providers. Additionally, cuts to the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative and the Immigrant Opportunity Initiatives (IOI) are actively deteriorating our city's first responders and frontline against mass deportation. The restoration and increase of these funds are vital to protecting our immigrant communities and represents the absolute least that the city can do to ensure that our families, our loved ones, and our neighborhoods are safe.

As public servants and community members, we are tasked with providing our most vulnerable New Yorkers with the human rights they are entitled to. Today, that means putting city funds where they are needed most. To accept the budget as it currently stands is to accept that we are powerless against the injustices we are seeing in our streets. To that I say, no Eric, no Donald, this is New York City.

Thank you.

NORTHERN MANHATTAN IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION (NMIC)

Written Testimony

Regarding:

**Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2026 and the Executive Capital Plan for
Fiscal Years 2025-2029**

SUBMITTED TO:

THE NEW YORK CITY COMMITTEES ON IMMIGRATION AND FINANCE

May 30, 2025

NMIC was founded in 1979 to protect low-income and immigrant families in Upper Manhattan. Since then, we have expanded into adjacent Bronx neighborhoods and support 14,000 New Yorkers with a wide array of programs to address Housing, Immigration, Finance & Benefits, Education & Career, Health, and Holistic needs.

Our Legal, Organizing, & Advocacy Services (LOA), provide a range of benefits to community members including immigration services and domestic violence services. We help our clients with applications including family-based petitions, citizenship application assistance, U-visas, and other culturally and linguistically competent immigration services. Nearly half a million residents in our core service area are immigrants (86% of whom are from Latin America) including about 230,000 noncitizens. Additionally, our dedicated Domestic Violence Unit offers direct services to survivors of intimate partner violence, bilingual and free of charge, including individual/group counseling, crisis intervention, trauma-focused therapy, shelter placement, relocation assistance, and case management. However, funding and therefore the capacity for NMIC's immigration, domestic violence and educational work now face serious challenges.

The Department of Youth and Community Development derives funding through the federal Community Service Block Grant program. DYCD largely enables NMIC's legal work on behalf of our fellow immigrant New Yorkers, from naturalization to DACA to petitions for

family members of citizens or residents. Critically, DYCD enables our complex case work with USCIS, including humanitarian applications like U-Visas or VAWA petitions for our undocumented domestic violence survivors. DYCD also funds NMIC's Education & Career services programs for both long-time New York residents and more recent immigrants.

The Office of Violence Against Women (OVW) funds and administers our Legal Assistance for Victims (LAV) program and allows NMIC's Domestic Violence Project to provide vital representation to survivors, the majority of whom are immigrants of various backgrounds. Our legal team has a consistent success rate in obtaining orders of protection for clients who face imminent harm- providing safety, stability and a path to healing. We also help clients navigate other legal matters including custody, when the abuser is the opposing parent, child support, and divorce. NMIC's work for our survivors is focused on safety and preventing harm, and in many cases can make the difference between life and death for the survivor and their children.

As NMIC has recently testified, CSBG and the OVW now face uncertain futures, which may significantly reduce vital services for immigrants, survivors, the poor and the vulnerable across all demographics. NMIC and other organizations must plan and look to alternate funding sources to prevent the elimination of entire swaths of our organization and services.

Nonprofits are already working beyond capacity but must now consider serious threats to their programs, and we are reliant upon the City and State for assistance in filling any likely gaps in resources. Community members in need of legal services, in need of help escaping threats of violence or death, will have nowhere to turn to.

On behalf of NMIC and immigrant communities across New York, we strongly urge the City to do whatever possible to expand funding for immigrant services. We would like to note that MOIA has recently announced contract awards for their Legal Support Centers, which will provide vital funding to nonprofits like NMIC for the next three years, and we also applaud their securing of additional immigrant services funding for the next fiscal year. However, we must still emphasize that the City needs a more sustainable, long-term infrastructure for legal and other services for immigrants. The vitality of our nonprofit organizations and the well-being of our community depend upon it.

Thank you for your time and for the opportunity to testify on this matter.



LEGAL SERVICES STAFF ASSOCIATION

National Organization of Legal Services Workers, UAW Local 2320, AFL-CIO

Natalie James
President

Rosa Acosta
Vice President

**LSSA, UAW Local 2320, Testimony Submitted to the New York City Council
Immigration and Finance Committees**

Re: Immigration Legal Services Funding

Tuesday, May 28, 2025, 2:00 p.m.

Good afternoon. My name is Natalie James, and I am the President of Legal Services Staff Association (LSSA), UAW Local 2320. Our union represents attorneys and legal workers of Legal Services NYC (LSNYC), the largest provider of civil legal services to low-income and marginalized individuals and communities in the country. LSNYC has offices in every borough, and each office provides a wide range of civil legal services, including immigration legal assistance. We welcome this opportunity to provide testimony regarding the need for increased funding for immigration legal assistance in New York City.

Immigrants in the city are under assault as never before, especially as they and their family members face deportation (removal), which may lead to threats to their safety and long separations from their families. Despite the severe consequences, removal proceedings are civil, not criminal, proceedings, so that immigrants don't have the right to free or affordable counsel. Therefore, many low-income immigrants are left to represent themselves in immigration proceedings involving a notoriously complex area of law that even esteemed members of the federal bench find it challenging to comprehend.¹ As a result, many low-income immigrants are not able to mount an effective defense in their and their families' removal proceedings, and they are deported from the U.S. The current climate and rapid changes in already complex immigration laws and policies create even greater obstacles and urgency for immigrants, their families, and communities.

¹ Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito described immigration texts as "dizzying" in his concurrence to the Supreme Court's 2010 decision in *Padilla v. Kentucky*. If a Supreme Court Justice finds immigration law difficult to comprehend, what hope can someone who may not speak English fluently and has no legal training have to present a case capable of prevailing?

Studies on the topic of effective counsel in immigration proceedings shows that having legal representation changes the outcome: Immigrants who obtain legal representation are much more likely to win release from detention and prevail in their deportation cases; 78% of non-detained immigrants with legal representation were able to remain in the United States versus only 15% of non-detained unrepresented immigrants; 32% of detained immigrants with legal representation won their cases versus only 3% of unrepresented detained immigrants.² Despite the proven critical importance, studies show that the vast majority of immigrants do not have legal representation. In a nationwide study of access to counsel in immigration courts, TRAC³ scholars found that only 37 percent of all immigrants, and just 14 percent of detained immigrants, had legal representation.⁴

LSNYC has a long track record of successfully representing clients in removal proceedings. The following are two recent examples of individuals in removal proceedings who were represented by LSSA attorneys and who ultimately prevailed in their cases:

- Staten Island Legal Services (SILS) represented several transgender women from Mexico in affirmative (at the asylum office) and defensive (in immigration court) asylum. Their cases were extremely strong, except that they did not apply for asylum within the one-year filing deadline. SILS' clients worked very closely with their attorneys and mental health providers (including our own indispensable in-house social worker) to overcome the challenging one-year filing deadline issues while litigating their asylum applications and to win asylum.
- Brooklyn Legal Services (BLS) represented a young gay Jamaican man in his removal proceedings and defensive asylum application. BLS filed a motion to reopen this case after an in-absentia order in 2022, prepared for an individual hearing in 2023, which was cancelled on the day of, and prepared again this year for the hearing. Unfortunately, during the time the client was waiting for his hearing to be heard, he was arrested 6 times for minor offenses, including one arrest in January 2025. Although all cases were dismissed, we anticipated significant pushback on the use of discretion, especially given the current climate and the Laken Riley Act. Our social worker provided a psychosocial evaluation and later, a letter of support to help counteract the arrests. Based on our robust

² The New York Immigration Coalition, The Immigrant Advocates Response Collaborative, & Brooklyn Law School's Safe Harbor Clinic. *No Safe Harbor: The Landscape of Immigration Legal Services in New York*. (February 2020). https://www.nycic.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/NoSafeHarbor_Final2020.pdf; Another study by TRAC also showed dramatic differences in the outcome when immigrants had legal representation in removal proceedings: five times more likely to prevail. Court, Eagly, Ingrid & Schafer, Steven, TRAC, *Where You Live Impacts Ability To Obtain Representation in Immigration Court*. (August 7, 2017). <https://tracreports.org/immigration/reports/477/>

³ TRAC is a nonpartisan, nonprofit data research center affiliated with the Syracuse University.

⁴ TRAC (n. 2).

submission of evidence, the client was able to win asylum in immigration court without needing to provide testimony.

These individuals would likely have encountered appalling obstacles to remaining in the U.S., and both had strong defenses that they could not have asserted on their own. Without the legal representation our offices afforded these clients, it is uncertain whether they would have prevailed against their deportation.

As importantly, beyond representing clients in removal proceedings, LSNYC immigration attorneys and legal advocates represent clients to obtain a variety of immigration benefits as defenses against their removal and to acquire legal statuses. The immigration benefits include defensive and affirmative asylum statuses, U visas, T Visas, VAWA-related grants, Special Immigrant Juvenile statuses, family-based petitions, adjustment of statuses, Temporary Protected Statuses, Paroles-In-Place, Employment Authorization Documents, naturalization, and more.

This is why increasing funding for LSNYC immigration legal services is particularly important now. A complex legal system designed to protect those with strong immigration cases has become even more daunting. However, LSNYC advocates have the experience to help some of our most vulnerable community members navigate these terrors, and we have done so successfully, despite the current climate. For years, advocates have pushed for a model similar to the criminal court model – access to competent counsel for all individuals in removal proceedings. However, at this moment, given the reality of today's threats to migrants, immigration advocates are focused simply on ensuring the stability of our programs so that we can continue to assist immigrant communities in our city.

Therefore, the City should consider expanding existing funding. LSSA estimates that the local LSNYC programs require, at a minimum, borough-level immigration units that include 6 to 8 attorneys or case handling paralegals, as well as dedicated support staff, including at least one social worker and one intake paralegal. Without this expansion of funding, many beloved members of our communities will be at greater risk. Placing these community members at risk has numerous tragic individual consequences, but these consequences also have a ripple effect on our entire city, affecting families, neighborhoods, businesses, and the economy.

LSNYC providers take an intersectional and holistic approach to supporting migrants in our city. We pride ourselves on being deeply embedded in our communities, developing long-standing relationships with community organizations that enable us to provide a holistic approach. Though we are primarily legal services providers, our teams, including knowledgeable and empathetic social workers, also offer essential social services to our clients without which legal representation becomes difficult, or even impossible. For example, clients often need support

accessing benefits or retelling the traumatic events they have experienced. Therefore, any funding commitment should also contemplate the following:

- Culturally-competent and knowledgeable representation, in the client's native language;
- Special attention and priority given to survivors of crime and domestic violence, people living with different abilities (especially individuals with mental disabilities), and young people;
- Individuals in proceedings would be provided with a single point of contact in order to access legal assistance. (A sheet of paper with a list of nonprofits is nowhere near sufficient.);
- Cooperation among local nonprofit legal services offices willing to participate in such a program, with agreement on how to administer the project;
- Flexible and multi-year funding to achieve these goals;
- Community Education about how to avoid deportation and detention; and
- Support for immigrant integration programs.

In closing, the need for legal services in the area of immigration law, particularly for the most vulnerable individuals in removal proceedings, is both significant and largely unmet. Despite the best efforts of our members to represent as many community members as possible, resources are limited, and their offices cannot represent every client who needs assistance. And this need for assistance has grown exponentially in the last few months as more of our community members are under threat of detention and deportation despite being eligible for or having pending applications for immigration relief. Accordingly, we would like to encourage the Council to consider allocating funding to LSNYC programs so that, at a minimum, each borough-level immigration unit includes 6 to 8 attorneys or case handling paralegals, as well as dedicated support staff, including at least one social worker and one intake paralegal. The result would be the prevention of needless suffering to so many New Yorkers, and a more just city for all New Yorkers.

We thank the Committee for scheduling this hearing and for affording our organization the opportunity to present this testimony.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Natalie James", is written over a horizontal line.

Natalie James

President, LSSA, UAW 2320

**THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL'S COMMITTEES ON FINANCE AND IMMIGRATION –
JOINT HEARING ON THE EXECUTIVE BUDGET FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026**

PRESENTED BY:
SOPHIA GURULÉ

ASSOCIATION OF LEGAL ADVOCATES AND ATTORNEYS, UAW LOCAL 2325

May 27, 2025

Thank you all for the opportunity to testify. My name is Sophia Gurulé, and I am a trustee and constitutional officer elected union-wide by the workers of the Association of Legal Advocates and Attorneys, United Auto Workers Local 2325, which represents over 3,400 legal services workers, including immigration legal services workers at the three New York Immigrant Family Unity Project organizations – The Bronx Defenders, Brooklyn Defender Services, and The Legal Aid Society.

UAW Local 2325 supports the three NYIFUP organizations in their request to double NYIFUP funding, from \$5.53 million per organization to \$11.06 million per organization.

As a UAW 2325 elected leader, as a line staff attorney in the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project, I am here to emphasize the dire need for increased NYIFUP funding.

I have worked as a senior staff attorney in the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project since September 2017. Though I testify today in my individual union capacity and not on behalf of my employer, The Bronx Defenders, my testimony today is based on my nearly 8 years of experience representing detained and nondetained New Yorkers facing deportation under three different presidential administrations.

Currently, the UAW is hemorrhaging legal services workers whose expertise is in detained and nondetained removal defense. The UAW has lost approximately 20 immigrant legal services workers at The Bronx Defenders in less than two years. For context, that is nearly half of the current staffing numbers in the Immigration Practice. With my nearly 8 years of experience, I am somehow the most senior staff attorney working in NYIFUP at The Bronx Defenders, which often shocks my union siblings in different practice areas at organizations like the Legal Aid Society.

High NYIFUP worker turnover is avoidable. Our ability to stay in NYIFUP depends on having manageable caseloads and salaries that allow us to afford our rent and bills (including our student loan payments). Our wins as unionized workers are wins for the poor and working class City-wide, union and non-union workers alike. When workers' working conditions thrive, the community thrives.

So when any of the NYIFUP organizations lose immigration legal services workers, that means immigrant New Yorkers who depend on essential deportation defense legal services are not

receiving the most experienced advocates or the most consistent legal support to fight their cases that can often last years. When workers leave, their caseload is then offloaded to committed advocates, but advocates who are increasingly overburdened, less familiar with the nuances of that person's case, and who are doing their best to stay informed and on top of rapidly changing immigration law and policy changes. I can personally attest – it is extremely challenging every time a worker leaves NYIFUP.

High turnover is particularly challenging when NYIFUP defends some of the most vulnerable immigrant New Yorkers in detained and nondetained deportation courts – people who have experienced tremendous trauma, abuse, and exploitation due to their non-US citizen status and are then expected to share that trauma, abuse, and exploitation to justify their presence in the United States before hostile immigration law enforcement federal agencies. NYIFUP work is very in-depth, hands on, legally complex, and requires extensive trust building and consistent care with the impacted person and their family.

Providing stable legal services is therefore essential to ensure immigrant New Yorkers are materially supported against an explicitly hostile Trump administration. Our work keeps families together, keeps essential caretakers employed, and ensures immigrant New Yorkers have a consistent legal team to call upon when the Trump administration finds a new way to terrorize them.

Immigrant New Yorkers also need experienced attorneys, paralegals, and social workers because an experienced NYIFUP advocate necessarily means retaining a knowledgeable, fearless, and creative advocate. NYIFUP legal workers are some of the brightest, most committed, caring people I know. They go above and beyond. We are motivated by a love of our communities, and a disdain for injustice. Immigrant New Yorkers facing deportation deserve advocates like these, and nothing less.

These are the NYIFUP advocates immigrant New Yorkers need when they are being deliberately attacked by a highly-resourced federal government that is hell bent on stretching and likely breaking the law to effectuate mass deportations as rapidly as possible.

Finally, I invite any of you to observe NYIFUP in action if you have any doubts about the dire need for increased NYIFUP funding. You can do this easily -- by observing virtual bond hearings, virtual deportation trials, or by just sitting in the virtual courtrooms on the *pro se* docket days – the days when people are being processed for the first time after their ICE arrest and before being assigned a NYIFUP attorney. Their cases are heard at the Varick Street Immigration Court, often before Immigration Judge Charles Conroy courtroom.

I also urge you to stay in contact with the UAW about funding essential legal services before the budget is approved. UAW workers are best positioned to share the hostile conditions in deportation courtrooms in New York City, and what we need to keep immigrant families together. That is why we are testifying here today as UAW - to fight for poor and working-class

New Yorkers to make this City more just, more equitable, and a place for all people to thrive, including immigrants.

That is always our goal as the UAW.

And as a UAW Region 9A member, given the Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian racism I just heard articulated in this hearing, I am proud to say free Palestine and while we're at it, free Puerto Rico. Thank you.



**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses
Before the New York City Council**

**FY 2026 Executive Budget Hearing:
Committee on Criminal Justice
Council Member Sandy Nurse, Chair**

**Submitted by Kate Connolly, Senior Policy Analyst
May 27th, 2025**

Thank you Chair Nurse, and members of the New York City Council, for the opportunity to testify. My name is Kate Connolly, and I am a Senior Policy Analyst at United Neighborhood Houses (UNH). UNH is a policy and social change organization representing neighborhood settlement houses that reach 800,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life each year.

A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

Settlement houses serve the very population of young people most at risk of being swept up in the criminal justice system. With the knowledge of decades of experience in youth development and empowerment, it is clear that the interventions that work are compassionate, not punitive. We must protect and support our young people and offer them the opportunity to seek a path forward without the creation of nearly insurmountable barriers.

Last fall marked five years since Raise the Age was first implemented across New York State, ending a shameful chapter in our history of prosecuting 16- and 17-year olds as adults regardless of the offense. Prior to the passing of this legislation, thousands of 16- and 17-year-olds were held in dangerous conditions on Rikers Island and other adult jails across the state. Moreover, these youth were systematically locked-out of age-appropriate services in family court programs designed to meet the needs of adolescents and avoid the barriers of an adult criminal record.

Youth crime has consistently decreased since Raise the Age implementation in 2018. In New York City alone, since 2013 there has been a 48% decrease in adolescent arrests for serious offenses. Evidence from implementation across the State clearly shows how the law has improved community safety and youth well-being.

Despite making up half of the state's youth justice system population, New York City is currently excluded from accessing the Raise the Age funding because the City exceeds the tax cap prescribed by state law. However, it would be possible for New York City to access this funding by submitting a waiver of hardship, indicating that our City and our programs need the resources that are available through the Raise the Age law. Again, New York City accounts for half of the state's youth justice system population and therefore should be able to access additional funding to support this population. However, Mayor Adams has yet to apply for the waiver of hardship, despite the administration's reluctance to baseline funding for many supportive programs for youth and justice-involved individuals, including:

- Learning to Work, a program that provides supportive resources and internship placements for over-aged and under-credited students;
- Restorative justice programming to support conflict mediation in public schools;
- Alternatives to Incarceration programs which help prevent recidivism.

It is critical to invest in programs and organizations that are serving our communities through youth development, violence-prevention services, and other alternatives to incarceration to prevent the necessity of further investment in the carceral system. **We therefore urge the Council to pressure the Adams Administration to submit a letter with the waiver of hardship to the New York State Office of Children and Families to allow New York City to be considered for the funding.** This would be beneficial for young people and community-based organizations offering these services alike.

Thank you for your time. For any follow up questions, I can be contacted at kconnolly@unhny.org.



**Testimony of Merlyn Mejia, Case Manager at the Women's Prison Association
Committee on Criminal Justice Executive Budget Hearing
May 27, 2025**

Good afternoon, my name is Merlyn Mejia, and I am thankful and honored to represent WPA's mission and impact at today's hearing. Chair Nurse and the rest of the members of the Criminal Justice Committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to provide this written testimony.

Throughout its 180-year history WPA is a force for change, challenging the systemic inequities that criminalize and marginalize women, particularly Black and brown women, at disproportionate rates. For these women, incarceration is not merely a consequence of a single event but the result of compounding systemic failures: poverty, housing instability, trauma, and lack of opportunity.

I have seen this firsthand, as a participant and now as a Case Manager. I support our clients through our home-based alternatives to incarceration program, JusticeHome. We work with the courts to allow our participants to remain within their communities and with their loved ones. We want our JusticeHome participants to maintain their everyday lives, without getting summoned away from their kids, their job, or their home.

That means less women are incarcerated. Less mothers separated from their children. And more opportunities, more chances to invest in community instead of the carceral system.

I discovered JusticeHome's impact for the first time when I was a program participant. I was a single mom in need of a second chance, an ATI program that could help me care for my child, and I found that through JusticeHome. The program changed my life, my daughter's life, and set me up for success. I was able to find gainful employment, and now I work at WPA as a case manager for the very same program that gave me a second chance. Instead of investing in my punishment, the city invested in my prosperity. In keeping a mother home with her daughter. In an alternative to Rikers that prioritized my safety and security.

JusticeHome, like all ATI and reentry programs, is a public safety response. Our work is in the community, developing the infrastructure to meaningfully address structural barriers that have harmed women—particularly women of color—for far too long.

Community-based initiatives lead to lower incarceration rates in New York City and create pathways forward for individuals and communities that have been disproportionately harmed by incarceration. The investments we have made are a start but only a start.



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When we divest from incarceration and distribute funds into communities and programs like JusticeHome, we build safer communities and a safer city. There are over 500 women held on Rikers Island right now. That is more than 500 women like me. While holding a woman on Rikers Island costs the city \$500,000 a year each time she is there, it costs the city about 1/10th of that to invest in our work, and the ripple of effects of our success is outsized and generational.

At WPA, we believe that together with our partners, we can develop the services and support to make the community the public safety-minded default, rather than Rikers Island. This requires greater investment in our work, centering on the following priorities to develop the infrastructure of services to meaningfully address the compounding system failures that diminish safety.

Alternatives to Detention and Incarceration

WPA is working to expand diversion programs like JusticeHome. These interventions target women before incarceration, addressing the systemic factors—poverty, housing instability, and trauma—that disproportionately affect women of color.

Reentry Ecosystems

For women returning to their communities, WPA offers holistic support: safe housing, clinical care, and employment programs that foster independence and stability. This ecosystem approach reduces recidivism and strengthens communities.

Policy Advocacy for Systemic Reform

Drawing from decades of frontline experience, WPA champions policy changes to reduce the criminalization of poverty and expand access to community-based support. By embedding equity in the justice system, these reforms create scalable, systemic change.

To accomplish these goals, we are seeking funding in the following areas:

1. ATI/Reentry Coalition Funding - \$1,095,200

The Coalition's community-based alternatives to punitive systems lead to lower incarceration rates in New York City and provide individuals and communities that have been disproportionately harmed by mass incarceration in New York with pathways to healing and prosperity. This funding and this work provide WPA with the foundation upon which we can build our holistic approach to expand these ATI/Reentry services.

2. Speaker's Initiative Funding - \$200,000

WPA is seeking funding to layout a clear, practical pathway to making incarceration obsolete in New York City. Shifting the system's default response to meaningful, responsive support in the community, rather than Rikers Island. This funding will allow us to strengthen our partnerships while identifying gaps and developing pilot services to address those gaps.



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3. Mental Health for Vulnerable Populations Funding - \$200,000

We are seeking funding to provide robust clinical care to our clients. We see clinical, behavioral health care as essential service for our clients regardless of where they are in the criminal legal process. These services will improve outcomes and public safety.

4. Discharge Planning Funding - \$1,000,000

With this funding, WPA will develop a robust discharge planning infrastructure to ensure that planning begins the moment a person sets foot on Rikers Island. That initial work can support long-term reentry planning. It can also support, where appropriate, a short-term plan for a motion to reconsider bail and a release into an alternative to detention or incarceration program.

Our vision is to more systematically shift resources from punishment to prevention, addressing the root causes of incarceration. In doing so, WPA will break barriers, shatter systems, and reshape societal norms to significantly reduce the number of women incarcerated in New York City. We will also significantly increase the opportunity, financial security, and stability for the women, their families, their communities and our city. At WPA we believe that the women we serve, like me, are more than a number and more than their past—we are unique individuals with immense potential to help shape our community for a better tomorrow.

Please contact our CEO, Meg Egan, by email, megan@wpaonline.org or by phone at 646.292.7710 with any questions.



Thank you to the City Council Committee on Finance for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Michelle Sencion, and I am the Government Grants Manager at Safe Passage Project. We are a non-profit legal services organization that provides free representation to immigrant children facing deportation.

Right now, we represent over 1,400 unaccompanied minors across New York City and Long Island. We are proud members of the ICARE Coalition, and our goal is simple: to ensure every unaccompanied immigrant child in New York has access to high-quality legal representation. Once we accept a client, we commit to sticking with them until we achieve the best possible outcome for them, usually a green card. But their cases don't resolve quickly. Most take three to six years due to serious backlogs in immigration court, USCIS, and Family Court. They are legally complex, emotionally intensive, and increasingly unpredictable given shifting federal policies and increased ICE enforcement.

Our work is made possible through City Council support, particularly through the Unaccompanied Minors and Families Initiative (UMFI). But we are at a breaking point, and I want to highlight three urgent issues:

City Funding Has Not Kept Pace with Need

We're grateful for the Council's ongoing commitment to the ICARE Coalition. But the funding amount has not changed in over five years, despite inflation, rising caseloads, and increased complexity.

Safe Passage has consistently requested \$1,251,800 in ICARE funding. Yet, we continue to receive the same \$1,051,800. For FY26, we are again requesting the full \$1,251,800 and respectfully urge the Council to finally close this \$200,000 gap.

We are also requesting \$100,000 in FY26 discretionary funding to ensure we can continue to support the increasing number of children impacted by immigration policy changes and enforcement. Our team, including a pipeline of trained attorneys and social workers, is ready. The infrastructure is in place. We can act immediately to expand services.



We would also like to emphasize that, while *pro se* models of immigration services are useful for limited types of relief, they cannot be the beginning and end of wide-scale legal services for immigrants in the city. We commend the City’s Asylum Application Help Centers for assisting thousands of individuals in meeting their asylum deadlines. But these centers are built for family units and single adults, not unaccompanied minors.

Unaccompanied children are placed through the Office of Refugee Resettlement and face layered legal challenges that span USCIS, EOIR, and often the Family Court. These are not cases that can be handled with limited-scope or *pro se* assistance. These children need dedicated attorneys who will see their case through to resolution.

Funding Gaps and Growing Threats

This past March, the federal government abruptly terminated the Unaccompanied Children Program, eliminating nearly \$14 million in funding for NYC legal providers. This included funding for over 100 of our clients and endangered the cases of over 1,300 children across the city overnight.

Although a temporary court order has restored some funding through September, the long-term future is unstable. In the meantime, families are being approached by HSI agents conducting unannounced “wellness checks.” These visits are deeply stressful experiences for young people and their caregivers. There are now reports of immigrant caregivers/sponsors being detained and placed in their own removal proceedings following these visits. This doesn’t just destabilize the child’s legal case, it can shatter the fragile support system these children rely on. We are investing more time and resources just to keep our clients safe.

More referrals from ACS

Our legal department receives at least one referral per day directly from ACS for long-term immigration representation. While some of these cases qualify under ICARE, many do not because they’re not in removal proceedings. The cases that fall outside of existing grant scopes are difficult to place, and there is no designated city funding stream for them. Without one, many



are left unrepresented, not because their case is less urgent, but because the system doesn't account for them.

In closing, Safe Passage Project remains deeply concerned about the lack of funding for youth who fall outside existing grant scopes, the continued absence of an increase to our ICARE contract despite years of advocacy, and the escalating complexity of our clients' legal and personal needs. City funding has not kept pace with demand, and without meaningful investment this year, we risk abandoning vulnerable children to navigate an increasingly complex immigration legal system alone.

Thank you for your time and dedication to supporting our work with immigrant youth.

New York City Council Criminal Justice Committee Budget Hearing

Written Testimony of Alana Sivin
Director, Greater Justice New York
Vera Institute of Justice

May 27, 2025

My name is Alana Sivin, and I am the director of the Greater Justice New York initiative at the Vera Institute of Justice, which works to end mass incarceration, protect immigrants' rights, ensure dignity for people behind bars, and build safe, thriving communities. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

We appreciate the Adams administration for including funding in fiscal year (FY) 2026 executive budget for vital services that improve safety and justice such as reentry services, indigent defense, supervised release, and mental health clubhouses.¹ Yet the executive budget still takes an approach to safety that overfunds enforcement and punishment to the exclusion of community-based safety solutions.

The executive budget underfunds community-based safety measures.

Specifically, the executive budget allocates \$2.85 billion to the Department of Correction (DOC), an 8 percent increase from the FY 2025 adopted budget, and \$12.4 billion for NYPD, a 4 percent increase.² In contrast, despite proposed investments in homeless street outreach and fair fares, funding is set to decrease for agencies that deliver safety by providing community-based services to New Yorkers, including the Department of Youth and Community Development (6 percent decrease), Department of Homeless Services (11 percent decrease), and Department of Housing Preservation and Development (8 percent decrease).³

We need to use the full range of tools in the public safety toolbox to prevent crime, respond to crisis, and stop violence. Punitive measures alone can lead to more crime: contact with law enforcement can increase the likelihood of future criminal behavior, and even one day incarcerated can increase the likelihood of rearrest.⁴ City leaders must follow the evidence and invest in what works: housing, treatment, and community support.⁵ Not only will doing so help prevent crime, respond to crises, and stop violence; it will also help lower the jail population on Rikers Island to enable its swift closure.

The council must insist on more transparency and accountability from DOC.

The executive budget continues to allow DOC to evade accountability for its overtime spending. As of May 14, 2025, with roughly six weeks left in the fiscal year, DOC had already spent \$276 million on overtime—more than double its \$135 million overtime budget.⁶ The issue is mismanagement, not a lack of staff: research from the Independent Budget Office shows that even during periods of rapid hiring, DOC’s uniformed overtime spending tends to increase.⁷ By continuing to fund DOC to excess, the Adams administration and city council allow DOC’s fiscal dysfunction to continue. Despite its overspending, DOC has budgeted overtime for FY 2026 at \$160.8 million with no clear plan for how it will achieve this significant reduction.⁸ These are not rounding errors; they reflect a lack of budget transparency and accountability. Moving forward, the city must insist that DOC more accurately forecast overtime and adhere to its budgeted plans.

In addition, DOC’s executive budget includes funding for 7,060 uniformed officers, though DOC currently employs fewer than 6,000.⁹ Eliminating the current 1,361 uniformed vacancies, without any layoffs, would save approximately \$176 million.¹⁰ By continuing to fund such a high vacancy rate, the city council and Adams administration allow DOC access to millions of dollars with little oversight for how such funds are spent.

Further, we applaud the city council for including additional units of appropriation for DOC related to officer training, management, infrastructure, and more in their response to the preliminary budget.¹¹ Still, we urge the city council to introduce a new unit of appropriation for programming, which will hold DOC accountable for providing incarcerated people with opportunities to engage in meaningful educational, vocational, and therapeutic programming—which is proven to improve public safety.¹² Importantly, DOC should partner with external organizations that possess the expertise and specialized staff to provide such programming rather than attempt to provide it themselves.¹³

The budget can improve citywide public safety by funding key services.

We also recognize the city council’s successful push to restore critical funding that was cut in the preliminary budget. Specifically, the executive budget reversed \$7.6 million in proposed cuts to alternatives to incarceration (ATIs), \$4.7 million for reentry services, and \$5.3 million for Intensive Mobile Treatment (IMT) teams.¹⁴ Together, these investments will enhance and support the use of ATIs citywide and support New Yorkers returning from incarceration to secure housing, employment, and supportive services. The funding will also create more IMT teams to help clear the waitlist of people seeking community-based mental health support.¹⁵ All these investments will help make the city safer.

Yet the executive budget still does not include funding for key services that will make New Yorkers safer. We urge the Adams administration and city council to include the following investments in the final FY 2026 adopted budget:

- **\$26.6 million for Justice-Involved Supportive Housing (JISH)** and associated services, which will enable the city to fulfill its commitment of 500 JISH units as part of the plan to close Rikers.
- **\$8.1 million in additional funding for the Board of Correction (BOC).** Currently, BOC's proposed funding for FY 2026 is \$4 million, or just 0.33 percent of DOC's proposed \$1.2 billion expense budget.¹⁶ To adequately enforce minimum standards and provide meaningful oversight over New York City's jails, BOC needs more resources: its budget must be pegged at 1 percent of DOC's annual expense budget. That would mean a budget of \$12.1 million for BOC next fiscal year.
- **\$7 million for Forensic Assertive Community treatment (FACT) teams**, which will enable more justice-involved New Yorkers with mental health needs to access community-based mental healthcare.
- **\$6 million for four new crisis respite centers**, two of which must be opened by the end of 2025 per legislation passed in 2023.¹⁷ These centers provide up to 28 days of housing and care for people experiencing mental health crises.
- **\$4.5 million for adequately paid peer specialists** to staff mental health and crisis response teams.

In total, these investments cost just \$52.2 million, which the city could fund more than three times over by simply eliminating the budget for DOC's uniformed vacancies.

New Yorkers deserve a budget that will deliver safety, justice, and accountability.

The executive budget is an improvement in terms of community-based investments, but it still fails to hold DOC fiscally accountable and leaves critical safety services underfunded. We urge the city council to pursue a budget that improves safety and justice for all New Yorkers by adequately investing in JISH, jail oversight, FACT teams, community-based mental healthcare, and peer specialists—and by holding DOC accountable for its astronomical spending.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. Please do not hesitate to contact me at asivin@vera.org if the Vera Institute of Justice may provide further support.

¹ New York City Office of the Mayor, "Mayor Adams Releases 'Best Budget Ever,' Fiscal Year 2026 Executive Budget Makes Significant Investments in Safety, Affordability, and Quality of Life, Expands Opportunities for Working-Class New Yorkers," press release, May 1, 2025, <https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the->

[mayor/news/271-25/mayor-adams-releases-best-budget-ever-fiscal-year-2026-executive-budget-makes-significant#0](#).

- ² All budget numbers in this brief provided by the New York City Independent Budget Office (IBO), shared in May 2025 and on file with the authors. Vera used data from IBO to have the most up-to-date numbers; for more information, contact Benjamin Heller at bheller@vera.org. Note that all Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 preliminary, executive, and FY 2025 adopted departmental budget totals include fringe benefits, pension fund contributions, and debt service. See New York City Mayor's Office of Management and Budget (OMB), *The City of New York Preliminary Budget Fiscal Year 2026: Expense Revenue Contract* (New York: OMB, 2025), <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/jan25/perc1-25.pdf>; and OMB, *The City of New York Executive Budget Fiscal Year 2026: Expense Revenue Contract* (New York: OMB, 2025), <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/exec25/erc5-25.pdf>; and OMB, *The City of New York Adopted Budget Fiscal Year 2025: Expense Revenue Contract* (New York: OMB, 2024), <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/adopt24/erc6-24.pdf>.
- ³ New York City Mayor, "Mayor Adams Releases 'Best Budget Ever,'" 2025; and IBO budget data, May 2025.
- ⁴ Juan Del Toro, Tracey Lloyd, Kim S Buchanan, et al., "The Criminogenic and Psychological Effects of Police Stops on Adolescent Black and Latino Boys," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 116, no. 17 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1808976116>; and Abigail Novak and Shelby Gilbreath, "Police Stops and Subsequent Delinquency and Arrest: Race and Gender Differences," *Justice Quarterly* 40, no. 7 (2023), 910-949, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2023.2235416>; and Core Correctional Solutions, *The Hidden Costs of Pretrial Detention Revisited* (Houston, TX: Arnold Ventures, 2022), <https://perma.cc/4UQV-4S4Q>.
- ⁵ See for example, Coalition for Supportive Housing and Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, *Fuse 10-Year Follow-Up Report: Initial Findings* (New York: Coalition for Supportive Housing and Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, 2023), <https://perma.cc/U94V-D6WP>; Melanie Skemer, Cindy Redcross, and Howard Bloom, *Pursuing Pretrial Justice Through an Alternative to Bail: Findings from an Evaluation of New York City's Supervised Release Program* (New York: MDRRC, 2020), <https://perma.cc/9WAR-TQ3Y>; and Elisa Jácome, *How Better Access to Mental Health Care Can Reduce Crime* (California: Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, 2021), <https://siepr.stanford.edu/publications/policy-brief/how-better-access-mental-health-care-can-reduce-crime>.
- ⁶ IBO budget data, May 2025.
- ⁷ Arden Armbruster, *A Shrinking System with Similar Spending: A Decade in Jail Trends (2014-2023)* (New York: IBO, 2024), <https://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/a-shrinking-system-with-similar-spending-a-decade-of-jail-trends-2014-2023-september-2024.pdf>.
- ⁸ IBO budget data, May 2025.
- ⁹ May 2025 staffing levels (5,699 officers) from IBO. Budgeted headcount from OMB, *Fiscal Years 2025-2029: Full-Time and Full-Time Equivalent Staffing Levels* (New York: OMB, 2025), 35, <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/exec25/exec25-stafflevels.pdf>.
- ¹⁰ OMB, *Executive Budget Fiscal Year 2026*, 2025, 104E-105E. To calculate this number, Vera first calculated that for every dollar spent on personal services, DOC spent an extra \$1.44 on fringe benefits and pension fund contributions. Using that figure, Vera then determined that the \$52,804 starting salary for officers as reported on DOC's website cost the agency an additional \$76,210 in fringe benefits and pension fund contributions. In total, therefore, each new officer costs an average of \$129,014. Multiplying that figure by DOC's 1,361 uniformed vacancies as of May 1, 2025, leads to a total savings of \$175,588,230.
- ¹¹ New York City Council, *New York City Council's Response to the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget and Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report* (New York: New York City Council, 2025), 60, <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2025/04/Fiscal-2026-Preliminary-Budget-Response-4.pdf>.
- ¹² Robert Bozick, Jennifer Steele, Lois Davis, et. al, "Does Providing Inmates with Education Improve Postrelease Outcomes? A Meta-analysis of Correctional Education Programs in the United States,"

Journal of Experimental Criminology 14, no.3 (2018), 389-428, <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/does-providing-inmates-education-improve-postrelease-outcomes-meta>; and Sheila A. French and Paul Gendreau, "Reducing Prison Misconducts: What Works!" *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 33, no. 2 (2006), 185-218, 207-209, <https://de-escalate.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Reducing-Prison-Misconducts-What-Works.pdf>.

¹³ For shortcomings of DOC-provided programming, see for example Jacob Kaye, "Jail Programming Suffers A Year After Doc Cut Nonprofit Contract," *Queens Daily Eagle*, May 20, 2024, <https://queenseagle.com/all/2024/5/20/jail-programming-suffers-a-year-after-doc-cut-nonprofit-contract>.

¹⁴ OMB, *The City of New York Financial Plan Reconciliation: Expense Changes* (New York: OMB, 2025), 31, 38, <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/omb/downloads/pdf/exec25/exec25-fprecon.pdf>; and "Mayor Adams Releases 'Best Budget Ever,'" 2025.

¹⁵ Caroline Lewis, "NYC Council Press Officials to Cut Wait Times for Mobile Mental Health Teams," *Gothamist*, March 24, 2025, <https://gothamist.com/news/nyc-council-press-officials-to-cut-wait-times-for-mobile-mental-health-teams>.

¹⁶ OMB, *Executive Budget Fiscal Year 2026*, 2025, 109E; and IBO budget data, May 2025. Note that both BOC's \$4 million expense budget and DOC's \$1.2 billion expense budget excludes fringe benefits, pension fund contributions, and debt service. We excluded these additional budget items because, given the vastly different workforce sizes of DOC and BOC, including them would distort the comparison.

¹⁷ Caroline Lewis, "Deadlines for New Community-Based Mental Health Services Pass the NYC Council," *Gothamist*, July 14, 2023, <https://gothamist.com/news/deadlines-for-new-community-based-mental-health-services-pass-the-nyc-council>.

Adhikaar for Human Rights and Social Justice
Testimony submitted to Committee on Immigration
Executive Budget Hearing for FY26
May 27, 2025

Adhikaar, meaning “rights” in Nepali, is the only women-led worker and community center serving and organizing the Nepali-speaking community on workers’ rights, immigrants’ rights, youth empowerment, access to healthcare, and language justice. We are often referred to as our community’s 911 and 311 line, serving more than 10,000 Nepali-speaking people a year. Most of our members are women and work in the informal sector as nail salon workers, domestic workers, taxi drivers, and restaurant workers. A majority of our members live in Jackson Heights, Woodside, East Elmhurst, Elmhurst, Corona, Maspeth, Sunnyside, Ridgewood, Jamaica and Flatbush. We are one of the newer and most rapidly-growing immigrant communities in New York City.

In recent years, we have seen an influx of new Nepali speaking immigrants come through our doors. This increase is also reflected in the 2020 census report which stated, “Nepalese population increased over 250%” and has been labeled one of the fastest growing communities in the United States. New members become familiar with Adhikaar through our English for Empowerment classes, workforce development training, or stop by our community center to obtain support for their workers’ rights, immigration, or health issues. Through these programs we create access to information, build community leadership, and grow collective power to win rights for our communities, and dignity and equity for all. For too long, the struggles and demands of communities like ours—immigrant women in low-wage industries—have been rendered invisible. We submit this testimony to uplift the voices and demands of our community in advancing immigration justice, workers’ rights and a just and inclusive New York City.

As new immigrants, many of our members are TPS holders, of mixed family status, or undocumented individuals who are forced to navigate a terrorizing, opaque immigration system that puts them at risk for deportation and detention. Our work in advancing immigration justice responds directly to these challenges. We push for comprehensive immigration reform at federal, state, and local levels, and are increasingly seen as a thought and action leader on immigrant rights on behalf of the hard-to-reach Nepali-speaking community in New York, and across the country. A central facet of this work involves the provision of culturally competent case support to our at-risk members, particularly at the intersection of immigration and workers rights. In addition, in 2024 we accompanied 200+ new cases related to labor trafficking, immigration bonds, ICE case support, general immigration, fraud, and wage; a process that involves one-on-one case management, interpretation, and community support. We work alongside various legal service providers like TakeRoots Justice, Legal Aid Society, and City Bar to provide pro-bono legal support for our members. Since 2015, we have been the only organization in the country providing TPS related-support to the Nepali community through a mix of town halls, KYR events, legal clinics and one-on-one support to limited literacy TPS holders. An estimated 1,500 TPS holders are supported every year, with a majority living in NYC. As the Nepali-speaking community continues to grow in the City, these services are becoming increasingly essential to our members and help inform our programming and community needs assessment tools.

Deeply linked to immigration justice is advancing the literacy and leadership of our members. For the past 20 years, we have provided adult literacy classes to approximately 2,000+ community members at our center in Woodside. We see adult literacy education as an immigrant rights issue, a feminist issue, a racial justice issue, and an issue of educational justice. Adult literacy education equips our members



with tools to access, navigate, analyze – and ultimately transform – social, political, and economic systems and conditions.

In addition to this, through our workers rights program, we have continued to provide workforce development training for our nail salon and domestic worker members to ensure they have the tools and resources to thrive in their places of work. One concrete way to fund immigrant women workers is to invest in initiatives like the New York Nail Salon Worker School, a school established in 2016 and administered by the New York Committee for Occupational Safety and Health (NYCOSH) with partners at Mekong NYC and Adhikaar. To date, across the entire School, 1,100+ students have graduated since 2016. For domestic workers as well we provide our “We Rise” nanny training program in collaboration with Cornell ILR and the National Domestic Workers Alliance-NY where we utilize a workers-rights based curriculum in Nepali, with training led by peer worker trainers. This program is supported by NYC Domestic Worker Initiative through which we provide members with training, resources and referrals to improve their working conditions. In 2024, Adhikaar provided service to 2000+ domestic workers through this initiative. In addition to the workers rights program, we also provide essential health care access services. In 2024, we were able to register 1000+ members through NYC care, and 600+ through the NY marketplace to ensure our members have access to health care.

For the FY26 Budget season, we ask that the New York City Council continue and expand this funding for these essential services and programs. For Adhikaar, we request funding from the FY26 Discretionary budget – specifically \$40,000 from CM Krishnan, and \$40,000 from CM Won. Lastly, we urge the Council to continue the funding of Adhikaar’s work through important initiatives - the AAPI Community Support (\$100,000), Adult Literacy Pilot Program (\$150,000), Domestic Worker and Employer Empowerment Initiative (\$125,000) and the Immigrant Women Workers Initiative (\$100,000), Speakers Initiative (\$50,000), and Welcome NYC (\$50,000).

We look forward to partnering with the City Council to ensure that our growing community not only survives, but thrives.

Thank You



Testimony of Scarlett Thompson, Senior Prevention Coordinator, New York City Alliance
Against Sexual Assault;

Andrea Rodriguez, Nightlife Liaison, OutSmartNYC;

Jasmine Joseph, Administrative Associate, OutSmartNYC

Submitted to the New York City Council

May 27, 2025

Good afternoon,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. My name is Scarlett Thompson, I use she/her pronouns, and I am a Senior Prevention Coordinator at the New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault. I am here today to speak with you about an often-missed point when it comes to conversations about criminal justice, **which is preventing harm before it can even happen. I am asking you today to commit to investing \$300,000 to support OutSmartNYC, a program that focuses specifically on sexual violence prevention within New York City nightlife.** This program is a collaborative effort with the Crime Victims Treatment Center (CVTC), and a collective of people who work in nightlife—some of whom have joined me on this panel today.

Sexual violence is one of the most underreported crimes, and yet the rates in the U.S. are still staggering. 1 in 2 trans or gender nonconforming people, 1 in 4 women, and 1 in 6 men will experience sexual violence in their lifetimes. According to the National Institute of Health, approximately half of all sexual assault cases involve alcohol consumption by the perpetrator, victim, or both. While we at OutSmart know that alcohol doesn't necessarily cause violence (people cause violence), we do acknowledge that nightlife spaces offer up a host of risk factors, especially for already vulnerable populations. Last year we conducted a survey of NYC nightlife workers, in which 70% of the nightlife staff who responded said that they frequently witnessed sexual violence at work, and 60% had experienced sexual violence at work.

OutSmart works to prevent sexual violence by training staff to recognize and intervene in harm, working with managers and owners on policies and environmental changes that increase safety, and providing support resources to the nightlife community. We have trained over 100 venues that range from small wine bars on the Lower East Side, to clubs that host thousands of people a night in Bushwick. Our safety advocacy program is widely utilized—we do this for large scale events such as Red Bull's Culture Clash event last year, and Pride events throughout June.



I have seen firsthand the significant impact of prevention education in building safer communities. Nowhere is this more important than in New York City nightlife. Nightlife is at the core of New York City's culture and identity. It is where people go to date, to unwind, to do business, to party, find community, and countless other things. By creating safer, more consent-forward and affirming nightlife environments, we are making this city exponentially safer.

Our team here at OutSmartNYC has been working tirelessly to support patrons and staff for over 10 years now, and we know how much further our reach could go if the city council allotted the \$300,000 we are requesting. Even without the staffing we need to conduct outreach, unsolicited demand for our programming far outstrips our current staff capacity to meet it. I implore you to invest in community-based safety efforts, led by and for the people who make up the heart of New York City nightlife.

The Alliance is also seeking increased funding for the following initiatives:

Recognizing the gaps in hospital services, prevention and response services, the Sexual Assault Initiative (SAI) together serves thousands of New Yorkers annually across all five boroughs.

Our initiative is funded at \$2.075 million and due to an increase in the number of survivors we are seeing and the increasing gaps in services highlighted by our mapping project, we are asking for an enhancement to \$2.5 million.

Launched in 2014 by The Alliance, Project DOT is a sexual violence prevention and youth leadership program and curriculum designed to address the unique challenges faced by young people from gender, racial and ethnically marginalized communities across New York City.

DOT is currently funded through the Young Women's Initiative at \$100,000 and we are seeking an enhancement to \$125,000.

Hi, I'm Jasmine. I'm an administrative assistant and social media manager at Outsmart NYC—and I'm also a nightlife DJ.

Part of my role on the nightlife team is helping make sure our trainings reach the right people and that our messaging stays connected to what's actually happening in nightlife. Because I'm deeply tapped into the community, I often hear about incidents through word of mouth. I bring



those concerns back to the team—protecting people’s identities—so we can keep our curriculum relevant, responsive, and grounded in the real experiences of our community.

As a DJ, I witness firsthand the sexual harassment and violence that nightlife staff and patrons experience regularly. Being part of the Outsmart team has completely reframed how I show up in those spaces. I now use bystander intervention tools in real time, especially in those grey-area moments—when something feels off but hasn’t clearly escalated. These small, subtle actions can de-escalate situations without making anyone feel singled out or uncomfortable, so as not to throw off the vibe of the dancefloor, which is a big component to bystander intervention.

Nightlife is a huge part of NYC’s social fabric. Keeping these spaces safe contributes to public safety overall—especially for marginalized people, who are often the most targeted. I’ve seen how impactful this work is, and I truly believe it needs more support.

We’ve been able to do so much, but there’s still so much more to do—especially in boroughs like Queens, the Bronx, and Upper Manhattan, where demand is growing. Please help us expand our reach and continue building a safer, more joyful nightlife for everyone. Thank you.

Hi, my name is Andrea. I started with OUTSMARTNYC in May of 2023 as a Health Equity Nightlife Liaison.

As a Latinx person, I understand the importance of spaces for joy and dancing. And as a queer person, nightlife has been a lifeline.

New York has always been a cultural epicenter for the world, and so much of that culture comes from nightlife. What I’ve come to understand is that nightlife is neutral. She has, is, and will always be there for all of us. To celebrate, grieve, create, work, inspire, and heal. These are the spaces where many of us can finally decompress and take off the masks we’ve been wearing all day, or all our lives.

I believe everyone deserves to return home not just safe, but well.

OUTSMARTNYC understands that the health of nightlife goes beyond safety. It is about the wellbeing of everyone in the room. We meet businesses where they are. We do not signal virtue. We tailor our workshops to reflect the culture of each venue, the people who work there, and the communities they serve without compromising our values and principles.



We also take the history and context of nightlife seriously. Last year, we brought together a group of trans nightlife workers who designed a training specifically to center the wellbeing of trans and gender nonconforming people. This community is not only at a higher risk, and also has, is and will shape so much of nightlife culture in New York and around the world.

The training, piloted at Elsewhere in Brooklyn, included a framework from one facilitator's PhD research. It focused on a spectrum of safety for trans people, from the absence of harm to the presence of celebration and belonging. It helped staff understand how every part of a venue, including how security checks are done, can be made more affirming.

We are asking for your support so we can continue supporting New Yorkers. If you want to know how healthy a city is, look at its nightlife. And for many of us, a DJ really did save our lives.

Thank you.



**Testimony from the New York City Anti-Violence Project (AVP) To the Committees on
Immigration and Finance at the Executive Budget Hearing
May 27, 2025**

Paulina A. Cohen, Esq., Staff Attorney

Good afternoon, Chairs Avilés and Brennan and the Committees on Immigration and Finance. It's good to see some of you again from the preliminary hearings. My name is Paulina Cohen, and I am a Staff Attorney at the New York City Anti-Violence Project (AVP). AVP has long been at the forefront of New York City's fight against hate and oppression, offering critical support to the LGBTQ and immigrant communities. We have clients who live in all your districts, so I want to express my gratitude for your ongoing support of AVP's work with survivors of violence. I know how seriously the City Council takes protecting the rights of the immigrant community and AVP joins your fight. Most recently, we filed an Amicus Brief supporting your recent litigation against the Mayor's Office for allowing ICE presence at Rikers. What I'm asking from you to today, to continue to fund immigration legal services, is the other piece of this puzzle to keep our communities safe.

As the political climate has become increasingly hostile toward marginalized individuals, especially those from the LGBTQ and immigrant communities, the demand for AVP's services has only intensified. The rise of hateful federal policies and rhetoric has made it harder for LGBTQ and immigrant communities to access justice and safety. Yet, AVP has remained committed to providing essential services to the most vulnerable in our City.

In particular, the need for comprehensive and culturally competent legal services has grown. Because of this increased demand and because of rapidly changing federal policies, the existing legal support system for immigrants in New York City has become overwhelmed. AVP, as the only LGBTQ-specific victim services agency in the City, is uniquely positioned to provide critical legal support to LGBTQ immigrants who are survivors of violence. Our work includes a wide range of immigration services such as asylum, U and T Visas, VAWA self-petitions, work authorization, adjustment of status, and naturalization.

In addition to direct legal services, we also offer clinics, webinars, and seminars to ensure that survivors are aware of and able to access these services. We also conduct broader-



scale advocacy (like the amicus brief supporting your litigation) to make sure that the issues our clients are dealing with on the ground get the broader attention they deserve.

AVP's co-location model integrates legal services with vital social services, ensuring that clients receive comprehensive, trauma-informed care. This model allows us to address not only the legal needs of our clients but also their emotional and social needs, offering holistic support to help them rebuild their lives.

Last time I was here, I shared a story about one of our clients who I helped file for asylum. I'm happy to share that his asylum interview went well, and in just a few weeks he will be eligible to apply for his initial work permit.

Today, I'd like to share a story about another one of our clients, whom I'll refer to as Daisy. Daisy came to AVP with a very complex immigration case. Her case had previously been mishandled, and her asylum application was bouncing back and forth between the immigration agency and immigration court. Daisy didn't have a clear grasp on the status of her asylum application, and the ambiguity of her legal status left her vulnerable to wrongful apprehension by immigration authorities. With the help of our team, Daisy was able to file a motion in immigration court to dismiss her pending case. And once her application was properly before the correct agency, our team was also able to get Daisy her work permit—a document she should have been eligible to get for years but was unable to because of the uncertainties of her case. With clear status and the ability to work, Daisy can continue the positive life she is building here in New York City, thanks in part to the support she receives from AVP. Daisy also benefits from counseling services provided by our client services department, ensuring that she receives the comprehensive support she needs.

As the Council pointed out in its budget response, Daisy is unfortunately just one of many New Yorkers that need access to such critical legal representation. There is no guarantee of legal representation in the immigration system, which leaves thousands of individuals left to navigate complex legal challenges that have serious due process, liberty, and human rights implications without appropriate support. But AVP is committed to expanding its services to meet the growing demand, especially for transgender clients who are being specifically targeted by federal policies. In FY 2024, our Legal Department handled over 281 cases, with nearly 70% of those being immigration related. After the first Trump administration, there was an increase in the demand for immigration-related legal services.



This trend continued under the Biden administration, particularly with the influx of LGBTQ migrants seeking refuge in New York, and of course, continues now just a few months into the second Trump administration. What is clear is that the overwhelming demand for social and legal services from the LGBTQ and immigrant communities has outpaced the City's available resources, and AVP has stepped in and will continue to step in to fill that gap.

With continued support from the City Council, AVP will continue to expand our capacity to serve LGBTQ immigrants and survivors, providing high-quality, free legal assistance. We are dedicated to ensuring that our community members have access to justice and safety, even in the face of increasingly hostile federal policies. With your continued support, we can expand that work.

In contrast to federal policies that have undermined the safety and dignity of LGBTQ, immigrant, and survivor communities, New York City remains a beacon of support. It is critical that the City Council continue investing in community-based solutions like AVP to protect some of our most vulnerable members. The funding we receive allows us to provide direct services, outreach, and advocacy that are essential in this moment of crisis. Simply put, without your help, we cannot continue to keep our communities safe.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.



Asian American Federation

Testimony for the New York City Council Committee on Finance Jointly with the Committee on Immigration

May 27, 2025

Written Testimony

Thank you, Chair Justin Brannan and the Committee on Finance and Chair Alexa Avilés and the Committee on Immigration for holding this hearing and for giving us the opportunity to testify. I am Riva Shang, Economic Empowerment Community Organizer at the Asian American Federation, where we proudly represent the collective voice of more than 70 member nonprofit organizations serving 1.5 million Asian New Yorkers.

We firmly believe that as a sanctuary city, we should welcome all immigrants with the dignity and fairness they deserve. Our pan-Asian community continues to face the struggles of xenophobia, a rise in anti-Asian violence, and ever changing and regressive immigration policies from the current federal administration. And more recently, an increasing number of Asian migrants have arrived to the City from the southern border, reflecting an increased need of additional resources that span from culturally appropriate mental health services, to linguistically accurate immigration services.

One in six New Yorkers is Asian, and the Asian American community is the fastest-growing demographic in New York City, as well as in the state and nation, making up 17.3% of the total population (or 1.5 million people). From 2010 to 2020, the Asian American population grew by 34.5% – the highest growth rate of any major racial or ethnic group in the City. This growth was also the fastest in all five of the City's boroughs. In 33 of the city's 51 council districts, Asian Americans represent 10% or more of the population.

As the number of Asian New Yorkers continues to grow, so have the needs of our communities:

- One in three Asians in New York City lives in low-income households, with Asian seniors experiencing the second-highest poverty rate in the city.
- Asian Americans have the highest rates of limited English proficiency in New York City, at 44%, more than any other major racial or ethnic group.
- Nearly one in four Asian Americans did not complete high school, the second-highest percentage of adults without a high school diploma among all major racial or ethnic groups in the city in 2021.

In the midst of these challenges, our community-based organizations (CBOs) have offered an outlet of safety and support for immigrant communities, providing culturally and linguistically appropriate services and initiatives. Doing the on-the-ground work takes an enormous amount of effort on the part of our CBOs who are immensely trusted within our immigrant communities. Yet, it is still painfully apparent that they need continued support to uplift our local immigrant communities and help them thrive. It is essential for this year's budget committee to prioritize the needs of our immigrant communities and CBOs which have continuously elevated and supported them.

Increase Immigration Services for Pan-Asian New Yorkers

With the lack of historic investment, access to critical immigration legal services for Asian New Yorkers has been near impossible, putting those who have limited English proficiency, with limited financial means, and who may have uncertain immigration status, at risk of being stuck in a cycle of poverty and vulnerability. Despite the fact that Chinese and Indian communities were disproportionately impacted by anti-immigrant policies during and after the Trump administration in comparison to their share of the population, there still exists no Asian-serving community-based organization that provides legal services to those communities.

Between 2017-2019, AAF built a rapid response network with 10 Asian-led, Asian-serving nonprofits to increase access to immigration legal services for low-income, vulnerable Asian New Yorkers. In FY 26, our Rapid Immigrant Support and Empowerment initiative (RISE) will leverage our track record to implement a multi-pronged rapid response program to increase Asian immigrants' access to critical immigration-related services and support the nonprofits that serve them. This involves convening an Immigration Referral Network by strengthening internal capacity of our member nonprofits to provide immigration-related services, connecting organizations to legal service groups, creating stronger networks with experts, and supporting community education and outreach projects. This network will enhance case management support for limited-English-proficient individuals and families. The RISE initiative will also create Know Your Rights and best practices compliance trainings for Asian-serving groups, equipping them with the knowledge and resources needed to protect their clients and organizations. Lastly, this initiative will launch an in-language media strategy to combat rampant misinformation and disinformation within Asian communities regarding immigration policies and their impact—or lack thereof—on public benefits and public systems. By integrating these efforts, we will create a more robust and coordinated support system for Asian immigrants and the organizations that serve them.

Language Access and Language Justice

AAF is a proud member of the Language Justice Collaborative (LJC) along with African Communities Together, MASA, the New York Immigration Coalition, and more recently Haitian Americans United for Progress and I-ARC. Together, we advocate for increased language access through the enforcement of existing laws and by creating innovative programs to address gaps in language interpretation services. In FY 25, City Council allocated \$3.8 million towards language access programming, including for the development of language access worker cooperatives and a community interpreter bank. AAF's role is to establish a language interpreter worker cooperative for five Asian languages, alongside the Collaborative's worker cooperatives for African, Haitian, and Indigenous Latin American languages. We applaud City Council's support and the Council to again support this initiative in the FY 26 budget to ensure continuity and sustainability for developing these programs that are in progress.

Within FY 25, AAF worked with our nonprofit member organizations to recruit community members to serve as prospective translators in the Asian language worker cooperative. Thus far, we received over 160 applications, and through rounds of screening, we are now working with a group of 16 immigrants, who are fluent in the top Asian languages in NYC - Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, both Cantonese and Mandarin, Korean, and Urdu - who are training as community interpreters and will go on to build a worker-owned cooperative. These interpreters, alongside translators from other immigrant communities served by LJC, will be poised to fill the critical need for high-quality interpretation for NYC area government, nonprofits, schools, hospitals, and the private sector, while also providing

opportunities for income and business ownership for the same immigrant communities that need them. The funding we are requesting from the City Council would allow us to continue building the cooperative with our trainees, who will begin providing services within FY26 and launch fully by the start of FY27. We applaud the Council's support this year and urge you to again support funding for this initiative in the Fiscal Year 26 budget to ensure continuity for these programs that are already in progress.

Citywide funding requests to support our work across our Asian Community

In addition to the funding requested for language access work, here are our other Citywide funding requests to support our work across our Asian community:

Support AAFs work and priorities through:

- **Speaker's Initiative:** (\$800,000)
- **Communities of Color Nonprofit Stabilization Fund:** Provide technical assistance and leadership development to help Asian-led, Asian-serving organizations thrive (\$150,000)
- **CUNY Citizenship NOW! Program:** Increase Asian American participation in the civic life of our city (\$250,000)
- **Hate Crimes Prevention:** Support programs that aim to prevent hate crimes through community-based safety solutions (\$200,000)
- **Immigrant Health Initiative:** Support programming to reduce mental health stigma in pan-Asian communities (\$100,000)
- **Mental Health Services for Vulnerable Populations:** Support the development of culturally relevant mental health and related services for pan-Asian communities (\$150,000)
- **Legal Services for Low-Income Immigrants:** Strengthen the infrastructure for a rapid response network that swiftly connects Asian immigrants with critical immigration legal support. Empower Asian-serving nonprofits with the knowledge and training needed to navigate and respond to fast-changing immigration policies, ensuring greater protection for New York's most vulnerable communities (\$500,000)
- **Support Our Older Adults:** Support advocacy and research that highlights the unique needs of Asian seniors in New York City (\$100,000)
- **Worker Cooperative for Translators:** Support the development of a worker cooperative to help community members become trained and credentialed as interpreters and translators in the most commonly spoken Asian languages (\$700,000)
- **AAPI Community Support:** Support programming to address the urgent service needs of Asian immigrants, including anti-Asian violence prevention and response through our Hope Against Hate Campaign; community education to support parents, families, and seniors in navigating and accessing resources in response to fast-changing immigration policies; and trainings and resources to support small business owners and workers impacted by anti-Asian hate and changing immigration programs (\$400,000)
- **Neighborhood Development Grant Initiative:** This integrated approach ensures that immigrant small business owners gain access to essential resources while being empowered to thrive in an increasingly digital and regulated business environment (\$100,000)

CBOs have led by example in how to spend city dollars effectively and this moment presents an opportunity for this City Council to show that New York City can still lead by example in protecting its most vulnerable. We at the Asian American Federation thank you for allowing us to testify and look forward to working with all of you to make sure our immigrant communities get the support they deserve. If you have any questions, I can be contacted by email at michelle.shang@aafederation.org.



**Center for
Family Life
in Sunset Park**

TESTIMONY

Executive Budget Hearing for Fiscal Year 2026:

“Protect New York City’s Adult Literacy Programs:

Maintaining Discretionary Funding for a Worthy Investment”

Presented to

New York City Council, Committee on Immigration

Hon. Alexa Avilés, Chair

Tuesday, May 27, 2025

Prepared By:

Tim Sheehan,

Chair, Board of Directors

Center for Family Life in Sunset Park

Center for Family Life

443 39th St., Brooklyn, NY 11232

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Good afternoon, Chair Alexa Avilés and distinguished members of the New York City Council Committee on Immigration.

My name is Tim Sheehan, and I'm Chair of the Board of the Center for Family Life in Sunset Park (CFL), a Settlement House that provides comprehensive wrap-around services to 20,000 children and adults in our neighborhood each year. I am here today to urge City Council to protect our immigrant community by maintaining the full \$16.5 million in discretionary funding for the Adult Literacy Initiative and Adult Literacy Pilot Project.

Through discretionary funding, our ESOL program, offered at no-cost, enables New Yorkers with Limited English Proficiency to begin their journey towards dignified working conditions, improved pay, increased access to public benefits and a greater sense of belonging in our neighborhood.

A recent report from United Neighborhood Houses highlights the positive economic and social impacts of investment into our community members through Adult Literacy programs. For example, an evaluation of a publicly funded ESOL course in Massachusetts found that those who participated increased annual earnings by 56 percent. In Sunset Park, this is seen through the story of Raúl, a student at CFL with an unwavering commitment to learning, who day after day took risks, learned skills and gained confidence in his abilities to communicate in English.

Through his own initiative, our class propelled him to prepare for, and enroll in, community college, where he is now pursuing his passion for chemistry with the goal of becoming a pharmacist. With the support of City Council in FY25, 75% of our program participants showed improvement in their English proficiency, leading to outcomes like Raúl's that can support working families and strengthen our community.

Ideally, our ESOL program would be supported by a robust baseline managed by DYCD that offers year-over-year funding. However, until DYCD revises its position, it is crucial that the New York City Council continues its support to ensure that adult learners continue to have access to the pathways they need to thrive. Thank you.

CENTRAL AMERICAN LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Ayuda Legal Para Refugiados Centroamericanos

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Heather Axford, Director
City Council Committee on Immigration
City Council Committee on Finance
Joint Hearing
May 27, 2025

Thank you for taking the time today to listen to the experiences of Legal Service Providers who are facing an unprecedented assault on the human and due process rights of our clients. I have been doing this work for almost twenty years, through now five different presidential administrations. I have never in my career seen this level of fear and uncertainty among our immigrant communities and those working to support them.

Our office provides advice and counsel to many immigrants every month who have arrived in New York City over the past several years and we are taking on as many cases for full representation as we can handle on top of our already full docket of removal defense cases. I am deeply proud of our small team. We are in court every week and have continued to win asylum for our clients even in the months since January 20, 2025. We have renewed TPS status for over 600 of our long time Salvadoran clients who have been in TPS status since 2001 (seemingly the only group to have their TPS renewed so far- our Venezuelan, Honduran, Nicaraguan, and Haitian clients face imminent termination of their status). Our attorneys are in court representing new and long-time clients almost every single week that the courts are open. But there are over 70 Immigration Judges at the three New York Immigration Judges now and only ten of us so it is tough to manage. In addition, we seen new assaults on our clients' access to due process on what feels like a daily basis: The Executive Office for Immigration Judges is encouraging judges to "pretermite" (deny) asylum claims based only on the asylum application form without even scheduling a hearing on the case and this has happened in one of our cases which is now on appeal; the Department of Homeland Security is filing mass motions to "recalendar" cases that have been administratively closed for sometimes decades (the oldest we have received so far were administratively closed in 2006) forcing us to drop everything to try to track down very old clients and file oppositions within ten days of hearing; and now for cases in immigration court where the client has been in the U.S. for less than two years, the Department is moving to "dismiss" cases while ICE agents wait outside the court room to detain the person and put them in "expedited removal," depriving them of meaningful process. It has meant that appearances that used to be routine (master calendar hearings and ICE check-ins) now require additional preparation, labor, and anxiety for our clients and staff.

The funding we receive from City Council year after year: As members of the ICare coalition representing asylum seeking families facing removal; through IOI which supports not only our removal defense work but the very important family reunification and adjustment services that we do for our clients after they win asylum; the discretionary funding we get from our local Council Member Gutierrez that supports our 5 days a week intake line where immigrants in

removal can talk to an actual person about their situation, gives us the security to know that we can hire and keep our incredible legal, paralegal, and support staff doing this work day in and day out.

In the past several years, non-profit organizations and institutions like law schools, universities, and private firms, and the City, have pivoted to increase pro se assistance as we stretched to help a large number of newly arrived immigrants to satisfy urgent filing deadlines and get on the path to work authorization. CALA has collaborated with our partners at Unlocal, Catholic Migration Service, NYLAG, VIA and Masa to reimagine how we can provide the most urgent services like timely filing and supporting Asylum Applications and putting people on the path to obtaining work authorization to as many people as possible as quickly as possible. The Robin Hood Foundation, the New York Community Trust, and subsequently the City through the Mayor's Office on Immigrant Affairs, have provided us with the necessary support to pilot the Pro Se Plus Project (PSPP) which uses a combination of community education, training, staff and volunteers to assist recently arrived immigrants to obtain urgent advice and counsel and timely file and support their Asylum Applications, making them eligible to get work authorization. In 2025, we continue to provide urgent advice and counsel, applications and motions assistance, and increasingly community education (both general know your rights trainings as well as trainings focused on trial preparation for pro se asylum seekers with upcoming final hearings). We meet at least once, sometimes more, per week to share information among the community organizations and the legal service providers regarding new policies and practices by the government and how it is being experienced in the community. This way our community organizations are armed with the information they need and legal service providers get constant feedback about what the community needs going forward.

The impact litigation and high-level federal court cases challenging the policies and practices of this administration have been and will continue to be absolutely essential. I am so grateful to our sister organizations doing this urgent work. But while these cases pend, immigrants are being put through this super charged deportation machine *today*, and investment in the lawyers providing that direct representation to immigrants going through the process is more important than ever.

The best way that the city can support this critical work is through continued and where possible increased funding amounts but most importantly increased funding flexibility that allows us to do the work that needs to be done seamlessly and without concern about whether that work will ultimately be funded. Funding that is structured to support both pro se service and full representation work is essential so that we can determine on a case by case basis (considering both the needs of the case and our organizational capacity) how to best serve a community member. Funding that allows organizations to report "units of service" as deliverables as opposed to cases, allows organizations to take on the more complicated (asylum, removal defense, detained cases in the event that increased local detention outpaces our NYIFUP program resources) without the majority of that work being unfunded. For instance, in a labor-intensive full representation removal defense case we are now doing written pleadings, applications, evidentiary support, testimony preparation, trials, briefing, appeals and potentially stay of removal applications (something we had rarely had to do in the non-detained context up to this point) and where we feel compelled to accompany clients to what used to be routine ICE check ins. That case should not be one "deliverable" for purposes of our city funding. We need to make sure that our funding is structured in a way that does not

disincentivize labor intensive cases at a time where so many cases are becoming more labor intensive than ever.

We look forward to answering your questions and meeting with you and your staff to further discuss this project and our other work.

Heather Axford
Director
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Chinese-American Planning Council
Testimony Before the Committee on Finance and Committee on Immigration
Chair, Council Member Justin Brannan
Chair, Council Member Alexa Avilés
May 27th, 2025

Thank you Chairs Brannan, Avilés, and members of the City Council for the opportunity to testify today. The mission of the Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC) is to promote social and economic empowerment of Chinese American, immigrant, and low-income communities. CPC was founded in 1965 as a grassroots, community-based organization in response to the end of the Chinese Exclusion years and the passing of the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. Our services have expanded since our founding to include three key program areas: education, family support, and community and economic empowerment.

CPC is the largest Asian American social service organization in the U.S., providing vital resources to more than 80,000 people per year through more than 50 programs at over 30 sites across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. CPC employs over 700 staff whose comprehensive services are linguistically accessible, culturally sensitive, and highly effective in reaching low-income and immigrant individuals and families. With the firm belief that social service can incite social change, CPC strives to empower our constituents as agents of social justice, with the overarching goal of advancing and transforming communities.

As we face an era of heightened challenges—particularly under federal policies that are increasingly hostile to our immigrant population—it is more important than ever that we invest in our local safety net. Our city has long been a place of refuge and opportunity, and we must ensure it remains so, especially in times of adversity.

CPC's community members have already felt the effects of new federal policies. Coupled with rising costs of living and housing, they are creating significant strain. Below are just a few stories from our community:

- Community members who use SNAP benefits have asked if they think SNAP benefits will be cut, because they rely on them to feed their families. Community members have asked if they should withdraw from SNAP benefits because it might make their data available to the Federal government, and despite being citizens, they are concerned about the impact it might have on their families.
- Many community members asked if they should pull their children (citizens) out of school because of fears that non-local law enforcement will enter the school property. For one of our school programs, we run a monthly teen night, which does different educational and academic workshops as well as opportunities for young people to socialize and build connections. 100 young people attended our teen night in early January, a typical attendance. In early February only 40 young people attended. When asked about their friends' whereabouts, the young people said their parents were scared for them to leave home and wouldn't allow them to attend.



- Multiple community members have asked if they should not go to immigration appointments or to doctors appointments to protect their physical safety.
- One community member came from China through the southern border of the US with her partner and had a baby in New York. Her partner was abusive and she had to take out a restraining order to protect her and the baby. She has now been asking about whether she needs to marry her partner to reduce her chances of getting deported under the Federal administration. CPC was able to work with her to provide in-language support and get her a lawyer through free legal programs, but these programs have long waiting lists, especially for Asian languages.

We are grateful to see that the FY26 Executive Budget includes \$4.4 million in funding for immigration legal services. But, the City has an obligation to do more to ensure that our immigrant and working class New Yorkers get the resources needed to thrive. We are urging for expanded access to support services such as CityFHEPS housing vouchers to all New Yorkers regardless of immigration status, to increase investments in Promise NYC, and allocate additional funds for adult literacy to meet the needs of our newest New Yorkers. Investments such as these will enable all families to improve their economic prospects, more fully integrate into their communities and thrive.

CPC appreciates the opportunity to testify on these issues that so greatly impact the communities we serve, and look forward to working with you on them.

Thank you so much for your time and if there are any questions, please reach out to Ashley Chen, Policy Analyst at achen9@cpc-nyc.org.

Testimony of Caitlyn Passaretti, Senior Policy Associate
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Submitted to the New York City Council FY'2026 Executive Budget Oversight Hearing
Criminal Justice
May 27th, 2025

Since 1944, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York has served as an independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce; our priority is improving outcomes for children and families through civic engagement, research, and advocacy. We document the facts, engage, and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions to ensure the wellbeing of New York's children, families, and communities.

We would like to thank Chair Nurse, Chair Brannan, and all the members of the City Council Committees on Criminal Justice and Finance for providing the opportunity to discuss how to improve the delivery of essential services and programs for NYC youth and young adults in the FY26 Executive Budget.

Restore Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) and Supportive Programming for Youth and Young Adults

Extensive research demonstrates the positive impacts of ATI and reentry programs, including lowering recidivism and crime.¹ Moreover, for every dollar invested in ATI programs, studies estimate between \$3.46-\$5.54 in returns, in addition to reduced costs for the criminal justice system and better community health outcomes.² We are glad that the Executive Budget restored and baselined \$7.6 million for Alternatives to Incarceration and \$4.7 million for re-entry services. These restorations will ensure these programs can support New Yorkers through case management, therapy, housing, employment training and more.

While these restorations are important, there is still a deep need for additional discretionary ATI funding to help scale community-based alternatives to incarceration. CCC, in tandem with the New York City Alternatives to Incarceration and Reentry Coalition, **requests an increase in funding through the Council's ATI Discretionary fund of \$2.4 million, or an additional \$200,000 per organization**

Additionally, there are several programs that have yet to be restored. We therefore recommend the following investments and restorations in the FY26 Budget:

- **Restore and baseline** \$3.3 million to the IMPACT program, an alternative to placement program for young people who would otherwise be sent to Horizons or Crossroads.
- **Restore and baseline** \$2.6 million for Next STEPS (cut August 2023), which offered one-on-one and group mentoring within a cognitive behavioral therapy-based curriculum designed to help

¹ Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. ATI Report. Accessed: <https://criminaljustice.cityofnewyork.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/MOCJ-ATI-RNR-Report-2019.pdf>

² New York State Alternatives to Incarceration and Reentry Coalition (2024). Unlocking Potential: The Role of Community-Based Alternatives in Strengthening Public Safety. Accessed: https://www.lac.org/assets/files/Unlocking-Potential_The-Role-of-Community-Based-Alternatives-in-Strengthening-Public-Safety.pdf

young adults make the attitudinal and behavioral changes necessary to avoid criminal activity and re-engage with education, work and community.

Close Rikers and Invest in Supportive Services

As of July 2022, 22.5% of those in Department of Corrections custody were young adults between the ages of 18-25, or roughly 1,300 people.³ Furthermore, 90% of this population was being held pre-trial, and therefore presumed innocent. This age group, 18-25, is referred to as *emerging adults*. Brain science shows that brains are still developing until at least 25 years old, and that these young adults require an array of developmentally appropriate justice system responses. Emerging adults are more vulnerable to the harsh environment on Rikers Island and will be more impacted in their ability to re-enter society based on what they witness or experience while incarcerated.⁴

The harms of incarceration at Rikers are undeniable. Under the Adams Administration, 34 people have died while incarcerated there. Moreover, in the first 6 months of 2021, 18-21 year olds were involved in 22% of the reported uses of force by staff but only made up 8% of those detained at that time.⁵ The dangerous impact of Rikers Island – and the disproportionate harm to young people – cannot be ameliorated by reforms alone.

The budget for Rikers Island should be redistributed and invested into services that support people experiencing incarceration and detention and assist their reentry. **We join the [Campaign to Close Rikers](#) in urging the city to remain on track with the closure of Rikers by 2027 and choose to invest in age-appropriate mental health services, housing, and reentry supports for people leaving custody.**

State Advocacy: Waiver of Hardship for Raise the Age

Last fall marked six years since Raise the Age was first implemented across New York State, ending a shameful chapter in our history of prosecuting 16- and 17-year olds as adults regardless of the offense. Prior to the passage of this legislation, thousands of 16- and 17-year-olds were held in dangerous conditions on Rikers Island and other adult jails across the state. Moreover, these youth were systematically locked out of age-appropriate services in family court programs designed to meet the needs of adolescents and avoid the barriers of an adult criminal record.

Youth crime has consistently decreased since Raise the Age implementation in 2018. In New York City alone, since 2013 there has been a 48% decrease in adolescent arrests for serious offenses.⁶ Evidence

³ Columbia University Justice Lab. (2022). Emerging Adults Incarcerated at Rikers Island. Accessed: <https://justicelab.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/Emerging%20Adults%20at%20Rikers%20Overview.pdf>

⁴ Columbia University Justice Lab. (2022). Emerging Adults Incarcerated at Rikers Island. Accessed: <https://justicelab.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/Emerging%20Adults%20at%20Rikers%20Overview.pdf>

⁵ The Nunez Monitoring Team. (2021). Twelfth Report of the Nunez Independent Monitor

⁶ In NYC, there was a decline of 77% in total arrests, and a decline of 48% in Index Crimes for youth under the age of 18. Data from the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services: Juvenile Arrests (Non-NYC) 2013-2022; Analysis of New York City Police Department data by Citizens Committee for Children of New York for 2013-2022. On file with the author.

from implementation across the State clearly shows how the law has improved community safety and youth well-being.

Despite making up half of the state's youth justice system population, New York City is currently excluded from accessing the Raise the Age funding because the City exceeds the tax cap prescribed by state law. However, it is possible to access this funding by submitting a waiver of hardship, indicating that our city and our programs need the resources that are available through the Raise the Age law. New York City accounts for half of the state's youth justice system population and should be able to access more funding. However, Mayor Adams has yet to apply for the waiver of hardship, despite the administration's claim that the current fiscal cliff necessitates drastic cuts to many of the supportive services and programs that are vital to New York City's youth and families.

It is critical to invest in programs and organizations that serve our communities through youth development, violence-prevention services, and other alternatives to incarceration to prevent the necessity of further investment in the carceral system. **We therefore urge the Council to work with the Mayor and the administration to submit a letter with the waiver of hardship to allow NYC to be considered for the funding. The ability to access RTA funding for community investments would be transformative for youth and communities in New York City.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.



**Testimony to the NYC Council
FY 26 Executive Budget Hearing - Mental Health, Disabilities and Addiction
May 23, 2025**

Thank you, Chair Lee and Committee Members, for the opportunity to share our budget priorities for FY26 with you.

Community Access was founded in 1974 to provide housing and support to people being discharged from psychiatric institutions. We are one of the leading providers of supportive housing in New York City, originators of an integrated housing model which has become a best practice nationally: affordable housing where families live alongside people living with mental health concerns. Our 400-person strong staff works daily to support thousands of New Yorkers through supportive housing, mobile treatment teams, training, education, crisis respite, advocacy, and other healing-focused services.

At a time when our city's mental health crisis is frequently in the news and on the minds of many New Yorkers, expanding access to care and funding critical services is more important than ever. We know supportive housing works. It is a proven, cost-effective approach to addressing the needs of New Yorkers struggling with mental health concerns, homelessness, and substance use. It reduces usage of shelters, hospitals, mental health institutions, and jails/ prisons. New York City must expand supportive housing, invest in crisis response, and support community-based *non-coercive* mental health resources. As you consider budget priorities, we respectfully request your attention to these key initiatives.

Expand Supportive Housing and Community Based Mental Health Resources

We are grateful the City and State have recognized the benefits of, and invested in supportive and affordable housing. Nonprofit housing developers like Community Access are mission-driven and committed to permanent affordability. They are natural partners for the City in ending the affordable housing crisis.

We applaud the Council for the **NYC 15/15** reallocation and ask for further investment in supportive housing in the FY26 budget. This year we ask for a capital allocation of **\$307 Million** to develop and preserve NYC 15/15 units in FY26, and **\$72.6 Million** for services and operating budgets for both new and existing NYC 15/15 units.

Additionally, we urge the Council to pass [Intro 1100 \(Rivera\)](#) to change supportive housing eligibility for justice-involved persons and invest an additional \$26M:

- **\$26M** (*increased from \$4.8M*) more in annual funding for **Justice Involved Supportive Housing (JISH)** to be delivered through a reissued RFP for 500 units of a JISH Plus model with service funding levels in line with those for other higher-need groups like 15/15 Young Adult Supportive Housing.

As the mental health needs of New Yorkers continue to grow, we need to invest in a continuum of voluntary services that are accessible when needed and available in the communities where people live. Models like the **Intensive Mobile Treatment (IMT)** program provide wraparound services to individuals who have been failed by traditional models of care and who are in frequent contact with the mental health, hospital, criminal legal, and homeless services systems.

We call on the Council to support:

- **\$30M** (*increased from \$22M*) in baselined funds to create additional **Intensive Mobile Treatment (IMT)** teams and an IMT step down program within DOHMH's Single Point of Access system. IMT funding is currently *stagnant* at \$42 million with a long waitlist. **We are advocating for a new total of \$72M.**

Community Access supports efforts to increase the number of **crisis respite centers** in the five boroughs. Having operated the City's first ever peer-driven crisis respite center since 2012, we know that respite centers offer a healing, home-like environment where people can get support in a time of crisis and work with peers to advance their recovery goals. Respite centers are a critically necessary alternative to hospitalization for recovery and healing to take place.

Incorporate Peers into B-HEARD Teams and Invest in Crisis Response

Community Access applauds the City for extending the geographic bounds of the Behavioral Health Assistance Response Division (B-HEARD) program. We need to further invest in this model that offers a public health response to mental health crises instead of sending the police, which too often leads to tragic, unjust, and deadly violence. CCIT and Community Access are calling for trained peer workers with lived mental health system experience to be a mandatory element of B-HEARD teams. Peers have the skills and expertise to advocate for connection to community-based care and avoid unwanted and unnecessary transports to hospitals.

Our FY26 budget request includes a **baseline allocation of \$4.5 million** to ensure competitive compensation for Peer Specialists staffing the city's mental health crisis response teams. This funding will also support the expansion of peer responders within the B-HEARD program, strengthening the city's capacity to provide effective, community-centered crisis intervention.

Support our Human Service Workers

As members of the Just Pay campaign, we support policies that will achieve equitable wages for human service workers in the long term. We applaud the Mayor and City Council for their recent

commitment to a three-year cost of living adjustment for human service workers. I cannot stress enough the importance of pay equity for our workforce, which increases the effectiveness of programs by reducing burnout and turnover. Mental health programs are more effective when trust is built and maintained over time.

Finally, extended payment delays for city contracts are forcing nonprofits to take on debt, lay off employees and cut back on programming because of this fully avoidable mess. We urge the Council to support **Brannan's Intro 514**, which would require interest to be paid on late payments under city contracts with non-profit organizations. Supportive housing providers often deliver critical services before contracts are registered or invoices approved, leading to financial strain that can cripple organizations and undermine service delivery.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. I look forward to working with the Chairs and committee members, as well as our agency partners, to advance community-based service options and ensure providers citywide have the resources they need to offer the support our communities rely on.

If you and your staff have any questions, or if Community Access can offer direct support to members in your district, please reach out to me at jrosenthal@communityaccess.org or call 212.780.1400 x 7726

Community Access expands opportunities for people living with mental health concerns to recover from trauma and discrimination through affordable housing, training, advocacy, and healing-focused services. We are built upon the simple truth that people are experts in their own lives.

www.communityaccess.org

Dismantling Racism Team
Congregation Beth Elohim

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Testimony of Congregation Beth Elohim's Dismantling Racism Team
New York City Council Committee on Criminal Justice
Preliminary Budget Hearing, May 27, 2025

Congregation Beth Elohim's Dismantling Racism Team engages in advocacy to reform the criminal legal system, in alliance with directly impacted groups. Congregation Beth Elohim, with locations in Park Slope and Prospect Heights, is the largest Reform synagogue in Brooklyn, with over 1,200 households.

In Genesis 1:27, we read that all human beings are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God. This foundational text guides us, as a Jewish community, to advocate for policies that will protect people who are incarcerated and increase public safety.

Mayor Adams' proposed budget perpetuates the crisis on Rikers Island instead of investing in programs desperately needed to improve public safety and keep people from cycling in and out of Rikers, such as re-entry services and alternatives to incarceration.

We need a budget that follows through on the legal and moral obligations to close Rikers by 2027. We urge you to do all you can to secure a budget that will improve community safety and reduce our City's overreliance on incarceration, **by increasing investment in Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) and Reentry Services:**

- While the Executive Budget fully restores ATI and Reentry programs to their FY2025 funding levels, **the budget should go further, and increase discretionary funding for these programs by \$2.4 million** to enhance and support the scaling of ATIs citywide as requested by the ATI/Reentry Coalition.
- **We strongly support the ATI/Reentry Coalition's proposals in regard to these community-based alternatives to punitive systems**, which are essential to the City's efforts to incarcerate fewer Black and brown individuals from communities that have been disproportionately harmed by mass incarceration by providing them with pathways to healing and prosperity. Just as critically, we view these measures as morally and legally urgent means to reduce unnecessary and tragically high levels of incarceration, thereby directly furthering the City's efforts to close Rikers.

Thank you for hearing us.



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May 27, 2025

**The New York City Council, Committees on Finance and Immigration
Testimony by Monique Francis, Interim Executive Director, CUNY Citizenship Now!**

Greetings, Council Member Brannan and Council Member Avilés, and members of the Finance and Immigration committees. My name is Monique Francis, and I am the Interim Executive Director at CUNY Citizenship Now! I am here before you today on behalf of the 55 city council funded employees advocating for continued funding for an organization that is making a difference and empowering immigrants, at a time in our history when the people who helped build this country are being treated in a way that is cruel and inhumane. This moment cries out for bold leadership, fearless advocacy, and the resources to ensure that every immigrant in New York City has access to free, high-quality legal assistance.

Preparing for January 20, 2025

After the 2024 presidential election, we saw the need to marshal a response and took quick, proactive steps to issue alerts to our networks. Our first call to action was to submit applications for benefits under the outgoing administration's existing policies, before new changes were enacted. We urged green card holders to apply for citizenship or apply to renew their status. We encouraged those with work authorizations and other documents that were expiring to renew well in advance of the expiration date. We prepared informational materials that addressed the anticipated changes to immigration policies and advised non-citizens on proactive steps they should take in advance of January 20.

Targeting the Most Vulnerable

Following the January 21st onslaught of executive orders targeting asylum seekers, parolees and undocumented immigrants, our next call to action was to offer "Know Your Rights" and "Family Preparedness" educational sessions to the community. We quickly saw the need to conduct these sessions via closed Zoom webinars, to protect those seeking information and ensure that everyone could listen in the privacy of their homes. To date we have completed more than 30 "Know Your Rights" sessions, educating thousands of immigrants and providing

information that is crucial during this period. To combat misinformation that is often circulating on social media, we found a variety of channels to share accurate immigration updates. We created a webpage to highlight and explain the policy changes from DHS and USCIS. We sent emails to you and to members of your staffs, and alerts through our listservs. We also have a recurring announcement in CUNY's weekly newsletter, which is distributed to more than 550,000 subscribers.

Individuals affected by these policy changes are desperately seeking our help. Between January and April our contact center phone system received more than 21,000 unique phone calls, text messages and callback requests, a 30% increase in call volume since November 2024. We made every effort to prioritize those who were calling to verify what they were seeing and hearing in the news. For urgent inquiries, we assigned an on-call attorney to respond. Our team has been working tirelessly with every group that is being targeted, and closely monitoring every lawsuit filed to counter the unlawful termination and revocation of status. We are offering virtual appointments to those who request them. Our legal staff holds case discussion and legal update sessions twice per week to ensure that everyone has accurate, up-to-date information to share with constituents.

The demand for our services has never been greater, which is something we anticipated. What we did not foresee was the targeting of lawfully present immigrants such as green card holders and international students. Under the new administration, there has been an increase in deportations carried out by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, creating fear and uncertainty within the immigrant community. Because ICE officials have been largely unable to locate undocumented immigrants with violent criminal records, they have shifted their enforcement efforts to immigrants who lawfully entered the U.S., using pressure tactics to encourage self-deportation to meet the deportation quota. Many immigrants are finding themselves in harrowing situations, unsure of their options and rights. CUNY Citizenship Now! is providing the support immigrants need to make informed decisions about their immigration situation. The reality is that for many of us, the United States is our home. We came here for a better life and will remain regardless of who is president.

The Ever-Growing Need

While the demand for our services continues to grow exponentially, our current funding will not allow us to meet these increased needs. **We are seeking \$5 million dollars in funding for fiscal year 2026 — a restoration of our current \$3.1 million dollar allocation and an enhancement of \$1.9 million dollars —** to ensure that CUNY Citizenship Now! has the

necessary resources to meet the increasing demand and can continue to deliver the crucial services we provide.

Council members have asked us to increase our citizenship events throughout the city, and we are prepared to do so. But we need additional resources. Funding will allow the program to expand, providing an extra day of service each week to City Council members and creating a more robust attorney triage hotline.

Since its founding in 1997, CUNY Citizenship Now! has been a beacon of hope and support for thousands of immigrants in New York City. We are committed to continuing to serve as frontline providers – over the next four years and beyond. We urge you to maintain and increase funding support for our immigration services so that our programs will continue to serve as a vital resource for immigrants who want to remain in the United States and help build a stronger and more vibrant New York City. Together, we can ensure that invaluable programs like CUNY Citizenship Now! can keep delivering the guidance and resources that countless New Yorkers rely on.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I look forward to answering any questions.



**Written Testimony from EAC Network
Submitted to the New York City Council**

May 2025

Presented by

Tania Peterson Chandler

Chief Operating Officer

EAC Network is a proud member of the New York City Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) and Reentry Coalition, composed of 12 service provider organizations with decades of experience in a broad range of alternative to detention and incarceration programs as well as reentry services. The Coalition operates as a supportive ecosystem to ensure participants receive robust, individually tailored services that promote treatment, long-term stability, and public safety. Collectively, we serve upwards of 30,000 justice-involved individuals each year.

EAC Network operates citywide TASC (Treatment Alternatives for Safer Communities) programs that serve as critical diversion pathways for individuals with mental health and substance use needs. Through our Mental Health Diversion and Substance Use Case Management programs, we conduct clinical assessments, coordinate treatment, monitor compliance, and provide court reporting. These services ensure individuals are connected to care instead of incarceration. Our programs are a proven strategy to reduce jail populations, support recovery, and improve long-term public safety outcomes.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the needs of our clients have changed significantly. Referrals have increased, and individuals now present with more severe and complex challenges, including co-occurring disorders, trauma, cognitive impairments, and chronic housing instability. Meeting these needs requires intensive, coordinated support. At the same time, our caseloads are at capacity and, in some boroughs, beyond what staff can reasonably manage.

Despite the growing demand, program funding has not increased. As a result, we now face waitlists for clinical evaluations that delay court decisions and access to treatment. Judges across the city have expressed concern about these delays, but without new investment, we cannot expand our capacity or reduce backlogs. Additional staffing is urgently needed, particularly licensed clinicians, forensic evaluators, and case managers who can meet the scale and complexity of the work.

If the City is serious about closing Rikers, it must create new investments in ATI and reentry services. These programs are not supplemental. They are essential to a functioning public safety system. Our work reduces incarceration, promotes stability, and provides courts with meaningful alternatives that are effective and cost-efficient.

The New York City Alternatives to Incarceration and Reentry Coalition respectfully requests an increase in funding through the Council's ATI Discretionary Fund of \$2.4 million, or \$200,000 per organization. This investment will expand clinical and case management capacity, reduce wait times, and ensure that more New Yorkers can be safely diverted from jail into care.

We thank the Council for its continued support and urge you to prioritize funding for community-based programs that improve public safety and create the conditions necessary to close Rikers responsibly.

Respectfully,

Tania Peterson Chandler, Esq., MPA, SHRM-CP
Chief Operating Officer
EAC Network
Email: TChandler@eac-network.org



Freedom
Agenda

Testimony to the City Council Committee on Criminal Justice

Submitted May 27, 2025 by Sarita Daftary

Thank you Chair Brannan, Chair Nurse and Council members, for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Sarita Daftary and I am Co-Director of Freedom Agenda. We're one of the organizations leading the [Campaign to Close Rikers](#).

Our members have both experienced Rikers and been impacted by crime, and they know what works to create public safety – things like housing, healthcare, work opportunities, and mentorship. **While Mayor Adams has said he wants to "close the pipelines that feed Rikers," his budget would leave gaping holes in our city's mental health infrastructure and social safety net**, continuing to funnel vulnerable New Yorkers into Rikers Island, where they are subjected to violence, deadlocking and sexual assault. We're calling on the City Council to ensure that the adopted budget paves the way for New York City to close Rikers Island. **Instead of allocating \$150M to hire 1,100 more correction officers, as the Mayor has proposed, we should invest in helping New Yorkers thrive, including:**

- **\$70.6M more to meet critical mental health and housing needs** through investments in Justice Involved Supportive Housing, Intensive Mobile Treatment, Forensic Assertive Community Treatment, and Crisis Respite Centers
- **\$2.4M more for alternatives to incarceration and reentry programs**
- **\$8.1M more for the Board of Correction's to conduct jail oversight**
- **\$3M to begin a masterplan for Renewable Rikers**

DOC's spending is such an epic scandal that it's sometimes hard to put into context. This an agency that a federal judge has described as both "overstaffed and underserved." While OMB has pushed for vacancy reductions at agencies that provide vital services to improve people's lives, DOC has escaped even the suggestion of such cuts, despite their vacancy rate growing for 3 years straight. Why is this special treatment being given to the one agency in the city that is required to shrink in the next few years? When the Independent Rikers Commission estimates that the borough jails will require only 3,240 uniformed officers, why is DOC budgeting for 7,060, which is 1,100 more than their current headcount?

DOC has pitched hiring more staff as way to curb their excessive overtime, but a [report from the Independent Budget Office](#) showed that DOC's overtime spending has often gone up when they hire more staff, not down. Maybe that's not surprising for an agency where [four uniformed staff members logged over 2,100 hours of overtime each in FY24](#), which would mean each of these employees worked 14 hours a day, every day of the year with no days off. We can't keep allowing DOC to devour the resources we desperately need to invest in our communities.

We are grateful that the City Council, in your budget response, is aligned with us, and so many New Yorkers, in calling for investments in mental health at a scale that finally matches the need. But we know

OMB is going to tell you, “There’s no money for that.” The Council can and should point to the \$150 million the mayor plans to spend to hire 1,100 more correction officers and tell them to get their priorities straight. We cannot allow this administration to continue budgeting for more harm and incarceration, instead of making investments that could prevent it.

We will submit along with this testimony a [full budget analysis](#) that outlines the amendments needed in the FY26 budget to pave the way to closing Rikers and passing a People’s Budget.

Thank you for your partnership.

Sarita Daftary

Co-Director, Freedom Agenda

Sdaftary@urbanjustice.org

[attached – FY2026 Campaign to Close Rikers Budget Analysis]



FY2026 Budget Analysis & Priorities

At a cost of over half a million dollars per person per year, Rikers Island is the most expensive and least effective tool our City has to create safety. In addition to exposing people to rampant abuse and violence, Rikers Island wastes resources that are desperately needed for housing, treatment, education, and other investments. It's time to use our precious resources to fund the things that work.

Priorities for this year's budget to advance the closure of Rikers:

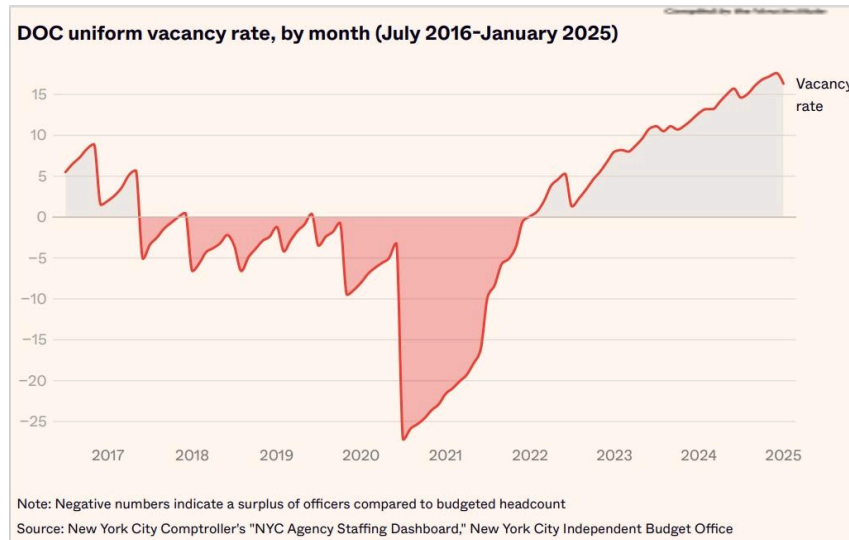
- **Allocate at least an additional \$70.6M to meet housing and mental health needs,** and fulfill commitments in the Close Rikers plan, including:
 - Building on the City Council's investment last year, the administration must **appropriate \$26.6 million more in annual funding for [Justice Involved Supportive Housing](#)**, and reissue the RFP for 380 new units with service funding levels in line with those of similar supportive housing programs. This will enable the City to deliver on the Close Rikers Points of Agreement to expand JISH to 500 units.
 - **Allocate \$24.7M more to create 15 more [Intensive Mobile Treatment](#) (IMT) teams, and pilot step-down teams.** The waitlist to access this evidence-based program is over 400 people. Resources are needed for both full-service teams, and to pilot a step-down version. The Executive Budget allocates \$5.3M for IMT, but far more is needed to eliminate the waitlist.
 - **Allocate \$7M more to create more [Forensic Assertive Community Treatment](#) (FACT) teams,** and to pilot ACT step-down teams in order to cut the long wait times (average of 6 to 12 months) to access this service.
 - **Allocate \$6M more to open four new crisis respite centers,** in compliance with Local Law 118-2023.
 - **Allocate \$6.3M to open 250 more residential treatment beds** for people with serious mental illness and with co-occurring addictions
- **Increase investments in Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) and Reentry Services.** While the Executive Budget fully restores ATI and reentry programs to their FY2025 funding levels, the budget should also go further, and increase discretionary funding for these programs by \$2.4 million to enhance and support the scaling of ATIs citywide as requested by the [ATI/Reentry Coalition](#).
- **Increase the Board of Correction budget to at least 1% of DOC's budget.**¹ While the Executive Budget restores proposed cuts to BOC's budget, their capacity still falls far short of what's needed to provide sufficient oversight for the City's jails. Establishing a minimum

¹ Other oversight agencies like CCRB and IBO have minimum budgets linked to the size of the agency they oversee. [Further outlined here.](#)

budget would increase BOC's headcount from about 33 currently to approximately 100, but would add only \$8.1M to the overall expense budget.²

- **Eliminate vacancies for DOC uniformed staff.**

- The Department of Correction is budgeted for 7,060 uniformed officers, but as of January 1, 2025 they employed [5,908](#) and [1,152 positions were vacant](#).³ OMB has not made a plan to rightsize this agency in alignment with reducing the number of people in jail and closing Rikers. By eliminating uniformed vacancies (which have been growing since 2022 - see chart below), DOC could realize cost **savings of \$149.6M annually**.⁴



- **Reduce overtime spending** by consolidating operations and permanently closing jails on Rikers, starting with the vacant Anna M. Kross Center, where 109 officers are still assigned.⁵

Preliminary Budget Analysis

Mayor Adams' proposed budget continues to misappropriate funds that are needed for real public safety investments, by maintaining DOC budget bloat while cutting funds to alternative to incarceration and reentry programs, and failing to adequately fund supportive housing and community-based mental health treatment. In order to follow through on the legal and moral obligation to Close Rikers, City Council must secure a budget that will improve community safety and reduce our City's overreliance on incarceration.

DOC's budget is still bloated:

- The Mayor has proposed spending **\$2.87 billion**⁶ on jail operations in FY2026.
- The administration is budgeting for [7,060 uniformed DOC officers through FY2029](#).⁷ By that time, New York City is required to close Rikers Island and shift to a borough jails system, which the Independent Rikers Commission has estimated will require [only 3,240 uniformed staff](#). Uniform headcount reductions are consistent with and necessary for a lower jail population and

² The FY2026 Executive Budget allocated \$4M to BOC. One percent of DOC's \$1.2B budget would give BOC a budget of approximately \$12M.

³ Per Independent Budget Office

⁴ Based on \$129,897 per officer, as [calculated by the Vera Institute](#).

⁵ The City of New York. Departmental Estimates. January 2025. p 1368

⁶ Including expenses, associated fringe benefits, pensions, and debt service. ["A Look Inside the NYC FY 2026 Preliminary Budget."](#) Vera Institute of Justice. February 2025.

⁷ Financial Plan of the City of New York. Fiscal Years 2024 - 2028. Full time and full time equivalent staffing levels.

closing Rikers - in fact, these reductions should have started years ago [when the jail population started to decline](#).

- DOC is on track to spend roughly \$300 million on overtime for uniform staff in FY25, 136% above [their adopted budget](#).
- [An analysis by the New York City Comptroller](#) showed that the **cost of incarcerating a person at a Rikers on an annual basis reached \$507,317** in FY 2023.
- Most of DOC's costs are driven by overstaffing. The FY2026 budget projects that [87% of DOC expenses](#) will be staff salaries, overtime and benefits.
- **The administration is planning either to continue overusing incarceration or to employ almost twice as many correction officers as people in custody by FY2028.** Neither option makes sense, morally or financially.

Commitments in the Close Rikers plan are still inadequately funded:

- In the [Points of Agreement on Closing Rikers](#), the administration agreed to establish 380 more units of [Justice Involved Supportive Housing](#), a model that has been hugely successful in reducing jail, shelter, and hospital stays, and generating substantial cost savings. But funding rates proposed in the RFP issued were so low that [qualified providers have not applied](#), and operators of the existing 120 units have been struggling to provide the quality services they are committed to because of funding rates that were drastically lower than other similar supportive housing programs. In FY2025, the City Council included \$6.4M in their discretionary budget to increase funding rates, but without a commitment from the administration to scale up this investment, these funds could only be applied to increase funding rates for the 120 existing units for 3 years.
- [The Close Rikers Plan](#) also promised "A new community-based mental health safety net." This administration has clearly fallen short of that goal - the number of people in Rikers diagnosed with a serious mental illness has [increased by more than 60% since January 2022](#) without sufficient investments in community-based interventions and care.
- The preliminary budget includes increased investments in the Supervised Release Program, which will be greatly beneficial if applied to expand the Intensive Case Management pilot program. The budget also includes increased investments in transitional housing, which must be brought online immediately, must have the lowest possible barriers to entry, and must be paired with an increased investment in permanent housing (like JISH, 15/15 supportive housing, and other deeply affordable housing).

Jail oversight cuts are proposed:

- DOC continues to [violate minimum standards](#) established by the Board of Correction, including [continued illegal use of solitary confinement](#); revelations of [sexual abuse claims on Rikers spanning decades](#); and recent disclosure of [DOC officers "deadlocking" people with severe mental health needs](#). Strong oversight is crucial. BOC needs more staff to fulfill its mandate, but the Mayor's Executive Budget proposes [reducing their staff from 35 to 33 positions](#).

Frequently Asked Questions

Does the Department of Correction have a staff shortage?

No. In fact, they are overstaffed. In "[A Shrinking System with Similar Spending](#)," the Independent Budget Office reported that between 2014 and 2023 "DOC staffing declined by 24%, while the jail population fell by 45%." In her [contempt order](#) issued in November 2024, Judge Laura Swain noted that "*enormous resources—that the City devotes to a system that is at the same time overstaffed and underserved—are not being deployed effectively.*" Reducing their headcount now is an important first step to [rightsizing](#) the department.

If they are not understaffed, why is there a shortage of officers to cover posts and provide services?

Multiple investigations and reports from the Nunez federal monitor have documented widespread mismanagement of DOC's enormous workforce, including officers [failing to fulfill their duties and falsifying tour records](#), [improper assignment of officers to non-jail posts](#) (including over [700 uniformed officers assigned to civilian posts](#)), and likely abuse of medical and personal leave (as reported [in November 2024](#)).

Does DOC need to replace officers who are retiring?

Eliminating vacancies would not prevent DOC from replacing officers who quit, retire, or are terminated. It could push DOC to more effectively supervise and manage their very large staff. In 2024, over 500 uniformed staff left, but DOC was able to hire only 290 officers, despite launching a broad recruitment campaign and lowering eligibility requirements.

How does NYC's jail spending compare to other cities?

DOC's budgeted headcount of more than one uniformed officer for each incarcerated person is more than [4 times higher than the national average](#). NYC's is the only jail system among the nation's 50 largest cities that has nearly as many officers as people in custody.

What will we do about those jobs? Aren't a lot of correction officers people of color, and women?

The choice to invest so much of New York City's budget in incarceration has meant that DOC has become a path to the middle class, including for many women and people of color.⁸ New York City could and should make a different choice - to invest in and raise salaries, for example, for [EMS workers](#), [green jobs](#) that can help us meet our goals for a vibrant and climate resilient city, and [human services jobs](#) that address community needs. Black and Brown workers deserve jobs with good wages and benefits that aren't dependent on the incarceration of their neighbors and families. We must invest in a [just transition](#) to expand and better compensate jobs outside of law enforcement - for example, in sectors like human services, where more than 80% of workers are women of color, and where constant budget cuts currently result in lost jobs and depressed wages.

⁸ New York City correction officers are paid \$92,000/year after 5.5 years on the job, and receive generous benefits. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/jointheboldest/officer/salary-benefits.page>



Testimony: Hamra Ahmad, Head of Legal Programs and Policy
Hearing: City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2026
Host: Committee on Immigration
Date: May 27, 2025

Thank you, Chair Avilés and the Committee on Immigration – Council Member Bottcher, Council Member Brewer, Council Member De La Rosa, Council Member Krishnan, Council Member Hanif and Council Member Joseph – for the opportunity to submit testimony on this critical matter. I am Hamra Ahmad, the Head of Legal Programs and Policy at Her Justice, a nonprofit organization that has advocated with and for women living in poverty in New York City for more than 30 years. In 2024, Her Justice provided a range of legal help to more than 4,000 women and their children in our practice areas of family, matrimonial and immigration law. Among the clients served, 92% are women of color and 85% are survivors of domestic violence. Three-fourths of our clients were born outside the U.S., coming from 103 countries across the world.

Support from the City Council helps Her Justice to provide direct representation and skilled advocacy in an arena that often fails to adequately serve the legal needs of the marginalized. In this moment of volatile change, as in ordinary times, legal services are essential services. The current federal administration has contributed to a heightened demand for legal services, increased economic instability, decreased funding for nonprofit organizations, and a potential reduction in pro bono support, thereby underscoring the critical importance of support from the City Council. Every day, our staff attorneys provide women with information about the legal remedies available to them and advise and strategize with clients to help them weigh their options and decide the course that is right for them and their children. We hope that the City Council will reaffirm its support for and partnership with organizations like Her Justice in recognizing legal services as essential to ensuring immigrant survivors' economic well-being and safety.

Organizational Background

Legal services. Her Justice offers information, advice, brief services and full representation in support, custody and visitation, and order of protection matters in Family Court; divorces in Supreme Court; and immigration matters under the Violence Against Women Act. Our staff responds to those who contact us with a broad array of legal advice, review of papers, and, for some, tools to ensure they get the best outcomes they can on their own. Many of the women who contact us receive free full legal representation through our pro bono first model, in which Her Justice pairs thousands of well-trained and resourced pro bono attorneys from the City's premiere law firms with women who have urgent legal needs. This approach has enabled us to assist tens of thousands of women over the years, far more than we could have reached relying exclusively on direct service. It also allows Her Justice to offer representation for many of the cases other legal services organizations do not have the bandwidth to take on – for example, child and spousal support matters, and litigated divorce. In addition to training and mentoring pro bono attorneys, Her Justice in-house attorneys provide representation to some clients whose legal issues are particularly urgent or complex. This both meets critical needs and allows staff attorneys to remain fully expert on the legal issues on which we train and provide support. By ensuring that more women have lawyers by their side, we help make their voices heard and we begin to break down systemic barriers to access to justice.



Community outreach. Her Justice also works to ensure that women living in poverty in New York City are knowledgeable about their legal rights and available remedies, reducing barriers to access to justice. We use a targeted, culturally sensitive community outreach strategy that involves conducting informational and know-your-rights presentations and capacity-building trainings for community-based not-for-profit organizations. Prospective clients learn of our services from colleagues at legal and social services agencies throughout New York City, including the Family Justice Centers, bar associations, elected officials' constituent services offices, court and law enforcement personnel, schools, shelters, hospitals, our website, LawHelp.org and word of mouth. The "Get Help" section on our website provides women and their advocates with easy access to information about their legal rights and detailed instruction about how to secure free legal assistance from Her Justice through our online intake application. Her Justice staff also conduct presentations to community-based organizations across New York City to provide organization staff and their clients with information on various legal issues and ways to access legal services at Her Justice.

System reform. We believe that the client-centered services we provide must also be paired with policy work – through independent efforts and in partnership with peer organizations and coalitions – to advance systemic reform while meeting individual need. The principle of our policy work is that it is informed by the lived experience of our clients – women living in poverty, whose livelihood and well-being are often determined by the civil justice system. That civil justice system is often invisible to those outside of it, which makes a focus on elevating the reforms to this area that much more essential for our clients and all who depend on it. Through this framework, we begin to break down systemic barriers that are built into our civil justice system and that reinforce and exacerbate economic, gender and racial imbalances.

Providing Legal Assistance to Immigrant Women Living in Poverty

The Her Justice immigration practice has a proven track record of excellence, and its impact grows every year. Our Immigration Practice provides free legal assistance to clients who have experienced domestic violence, sex trafficking, labor trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence as they seek to stabilize their immigration status in the United States. The legal services we provide are especially important for survivors of violence since abusers and traffickers commonly exploit a survivor's lack of status as a powerful way to exercise control.

Her Justice lawyers and the pro bono attorneys that provide representation stabilize cases and work with clients to prepare applications. Yet, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) continues to raise barriers to our clients' ability to stabilize their lives and work legally in this country. (And our clients are still reeling from the destabilizing impact of the pandemic on their lives and communities.) Changes in immigration policies and news items related to proposed changes in laws (that may never come to fruition), along with threats of harsh immigration enforcement, cause confusion and fear in immigrant communities. The need for free, quality, and culturally and linguistically competent immigration legal services and accurate, accessible information in immigrant communities has never been more critical.

Reaching Vulnerable Immigrants in Community

To reach vulnerable immigrants in New York City, Her Justice will continue to build our replicable outreach model that combines capacity-building for local offices, know-your-rights events for District office constituents, and targeted legal



clinics. We know that in a climate of heightened immigration enforcement, the best way to reach foreign-born clients can be to partner with trusted community-based offices, nonprofits and District offices. Her Justice engages in capacity-building training for local providers – especially where they do not have legal staff – with a focus on those programs that serve communities particularly isolated by culture or identity. This training ensures that staff and advocates can provide basic legal information and make informed referrals to Her Justice and other providers. Additionally, we deliver know-your-rights events, which include educating women in the community about civil options in family and matrimonial law and immigration remedies. All community services are responsive to local language and cultural needs.

To extend the reach of our legal information to New York City’s communities in the current political climate and with its chilling effect on undocumented immigrant survivors who need legal help, we recently enhanced the know-your-rights information on our website. Our attorneys compiled and reviewed information from a range of community partner organizations and shared the most pertinent on our website. We also recently shared on social media an explanation of the difference between administrative and judicial warrants to equip clients and other community members with information about legal entry and search by U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement officers. We understand both our website and social media feed are seeing significant increased traffic from users, which is a testament to the need for this type of information from a trusted source like Her Justice.

Advocating for System Reform

In addition to working with individual women in need, Her Justice continues to advocate for reform to the immigration system so that the greatest number of immigrant women can obtain and preserve the best possible status, through a process that prioritizes their safety and dignity. Her Justice is grateful to the Council for continuing to shine a light on the harms facing immigrant New Yorkers who are more vulnerable now than ever.

Access to the Courts. During the last several years, we have dedicated significant time and effort to advocating against undue and unfair immigration enforcement actions, including preventing U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement from making arrests in the courts, which have had a chilling effect on our clients’ willingness to seek help. In 2020, we were thrilled to witness the passing of the New York State Protect Our Courts Act, which marked significant progress towards decriminalizing our immigrant communities and making justice accessible to all. It is a key policy position of Her Justice that laws and policies providing relief to survivors of gender-based violence should not require survivors to cooperate with or seek safety from law enforcement to prove their experience of abuse, since survivors seek safety in many ways. Our policy and advocacy work aims to lift up the need for fair treatment of immigrant New Yorkers and the power of meaningful access to justice and benefits to change lives.

Work Authorization and Economic Stability. Her Justice knows that our immigration clients – and all immigrant New Yorkers – make remarkable contributions to and are part of the very fabric of our City. In 2023, Her Justice published a policy research report, *Stories from Immigrant Survivors of Gender-Based Violence: The Impact of Work Authorization*, which brings forward the experiences of immigrant survivors seeking legal permission to work in the United States and explores the impact on their lives – as women, mothers, and workers – of obtaining work authorization (employment authorization documentation or “EAD”). The majority of Her Justice immigration clients are mothers raising families in



New York City and contributing mightily to our City's economy. The wave of new migrants and asylum seekers arriving in the U.S and in New York City shed new light on the role of immigrant workers in the United States, yet many work without the legal protections that would match the value of their contributions to the economy.

Her Justice conducted the qualitative research project to explore the full impact of work authorization on our clients' lives, particularly as the delays in obtaining a work permit lengthened with the average wait time for EAD for U visa petitioners increasing by 38% from 3.7 years in 2018-2019 to 5.1 years by 2022. Without EAD, 100% of the women interviewed did not feel financially stable or have enough income to meet their basic needs. For immigrants who are survivors of domestic violence without an EAD, 81% stayed with their abusive partners or exploiters because they lacked safe, alternative housing and their partner controlled the household resources. We believe this research demands a commitment from policymakers to addressing the needs of all undocumented immigrants for safe and secure employment, especially immigrant survivors like those featured in this report who lived in the U.S. for years without the legal right to work to support themselves and their children while seeking safety from abuse. Her Justice's commitment to advocating for a more equitable immigration system is informed by the experiences of immigrant survivors of abuse, and we call for their needs to remain a priority in immigration reform and in City and State efforts to protect the rights of immigrant New Yorkers.

As New Yorkers, we are committed to lifting our community up. There are 3.1 million immigrants living in New York City, and immigrant women represent over half of the clients of Her Justice. When immigrant women are lifted, their children and communities rise with them. We thank the City Council for the support for the essential legal services that we provide to women living in poverty in New York City and your partnership on policy reform to benefit all New Yorkers, and we look forward to continuing to work together to improve the delivery of justice to all.

Respectfully, ☐

Hamra Ahmad, Esq.
Head of Legal Programs and Policy
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NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION
Executive Budget Hearing – Committee on Immigration
May 27th, 2025

Thank you to the City Council, Immigration Chair Aviles and the Committee on Immigration for their attention and commitment to supporting NYC's immigrant community in the 2026 fiscal budget cycle. My name is Roberto Ponce, Community Engagement Associate.

I am testifying today on behalf of Hot Bread Kitchen – an organization that creates economic opportunity through culinary job skills training, food entrepreneurship, and an ecosystem of support for individuals who face barriers to meaningful careers. This year, we will continue our efforts to provide workforce training for New York's asylum-seeking population.

Over the past 17 years, Hot Bread Kitchen has enrolled over 2,000 program participants, whom we call members, into our programs to help them launch careers in the food industry, start and grow their small businesses, and access the resources they need to succeed at work and in the world. Our community includes residents of 50 City Council districts, 91% of our members identify as people of color, with 86% identifying as women. Just over half of our members across our programs were born outside of the United States and are non-native English speakers, with approximately 82% of our members unemployed before starting one of our programs, reaching starting wages post graduation ranging from \$18-22 an hour. Our members are dedicated, hard-working New Yorkers seeking opportunities for meaningful careers, sustainable income, and long-term wealth generation for their families.

Hot Bread Kitchen offers our members several programs to reach economic mobility; workforce training via our foundational Culinary Fundamentals training, Culinary Career Pathways for New New Yorkers, First Course, and Front of House training, and small business incubation via Hot Bread Kitchen Incubates. Additionally, we provide wraparound support, including case management and referrals to our 200+ community-based organizations to access childcare vouchers, affordable housing, and mental health services. Plus, we provide MetroCards, stipends during their time in our programs, and job placement to our network of 300+ employer partners.

We are grateful to have previously received funding from the City Council, which has supported our growing number of enrolled members and our expansion of offerings into other boroughs, including the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens. With the Council's investment, we surpassed our three-year strategic growth goal of 1,000 Breadwinners strong by 2024.

We are renewing our efforts to seek the Council's support for **Culinary Career Pathways for New New Yorkers in Fiscal Year 26, specifically for the continuation of this needed program, and ask for your support for our \$100,000 Welcome NYC Initiative Funding and \$100,000 Support for Women Immigrant Workers Initiative requests.** With the arrival of an unprecedented number of migrants and asylum seekers in New York City over the past several years, Hot Bread Kitchen developed and launched this program by adapting our standard Culinary Fundamentals training curriculum to provide targeted services for this new population, supported predominantly by private funding. In 2025, we graduated one cohort of 24 members and just began a second cohort of 25 members. For both cohorts, we had over 500 applications for each, indicating the demand and need for this program.

The impact of our program is best demonstrated by stories about our members, like Brianna – a Culinary Careers Pathways For New New Yorkers graduate. As a transgender woman, Brianna made the hard decision to leave her home to evade the constant threat of hate crimes and indifference from law enforcement in Venezuela. “I immigrated here because in my country there is a lot of discrimination for employment opportunities. But not only that, I lived alone in my apartment, and I was attacked many times physically as well as psychologically. It was really difficult to make the decision to immigrate. Leaving my country has always been a fear of mine,” Brianna shared. After completing Hot Bread Kitchen’s New New Yorkers program, Brianna was placed in a job with our employer partner, and Brooklyn-based bakery, Colson Patisserie. Reflecting on where she is now, Brianna shared, “I feel so much safer living here in New York. I like living here because of the opportunities that exist, and because I can live like a normal person. I also really like my job and taking advantage of all of the opportunities.”

As Hot Bread Kitchen continues to serve more New Yorkers each year in accessing economic mobility, we respectfully urge the Committee on Immigration to support our applications for funding for this vital training. Thank you for your attention and investment in Hot Bread Kitchen’s work and community.

Respectfully submitted,

Roberto Ponce



Testimony of Sierra Kraft, Executive Director, ICARE Coalition

Before the New York City Council Committees on Immigration and Finance

Executive Budget Hearing

Delivered: May 27, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Brannan, Chair Avilés, and members of the Committees on Immigration and Finance. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sierra Kraft, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort, or ICARE, a citywide coalition of seven legal service providers that, for over a decade, has ensured that unaccompanied immigrant children in New York City have access to free, high-quality legal representation.

Our member organizations: Catholic Charities Community Services, Central American Legal Assistance (CALA), Human Rights First, Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), Legal Aid Society, The Door, and Safe Passage Project, are on the frontlines every day. Together, we've served more than 14,000 children and families, helping them navigate a complex immigration system, secure legal status, and begin to rebuild their lives.

We are in a moment of crisis, one that is unfolding in real time and in plain sight.

Unaccompanied children are being targeted through harmful policies and systemic failures, and the consequences are playing out every day in our neighborhoods and courtrooms:

- On March 21st, the federal government abruptly terminated the Unaccompanied Children Program contract, cutting nearly \$14 million in funding for New York City legal service providers. This decision, made without notice, transition, or regard for the consequences, immediately left more than 1,300 children without an attorney. Some had court hearings scheduled the next day, and those cases moved forward anyway.
- Children are receiving Notices to Appear before they've even had a chance to find a lawyer.



- Immigration judges are ordering deportations when children miss court, even when a young mother misses court because she is giving birth.
- ICE agents are showing up at homes at 6 AM, conducting so-called “wellness checks” and interrogating children, even when their cases have been closed, sowing fear and distrust in communities that are already on edge.
- New federal sponsor requirements like fingerprinting, background checks, and strict ID policies are preventing reunification and keeping families apart. We’re watching family separation happen all over again, this time, in our own city.

This is systemic failure, and it is happening now. And at the very moment when the need for legal services is exploding, the safety net we’ve worked so hard to build is unraveling. Providers are laying off staff. Intake is frozen. Referrals are being turned away. We are triaging at every level, and children are falling through the cracks.

City Council has long been a champion for immigrant youth through the Unaccompanied Minors and Families Initiative (UMFI), and we are deeply grateful for that support. But the UMFI funding has not increased in over six years, despite skyrocketing caseloads, rising costs, and a legal landscape that is shifting by the day. Today, we are asking the City to meet the urgency of this moment and investment in demands.

Specifically, we respectfully request:

- **\$6.297 million in FY26 discretionary funding through UMFI** to sustain and stabilize legal services for 2,013 unaccompanied children and families; and
- **\$5.4 million in emergency funding** to address the immediate fallout of the federal contract termination and prevent the further erosion of services.

These young people are already here. They are attending school, caring for siblings, trying to heal from trauma, and they’re doing it all while navigating one of the most complicated legal systems in this country. Without an attorney, a child’s chance of staying in the U.S. drops below 15%. With an ICARE attorney, that number jumps to over 90%.



This is not just about legal services. It's about who we are as a city. It's about ensuring that children who have already survived violence, exploitation, and separation are not retraumatized and retrafficked by a system that sees them as disposable.

We have one young client who missed her court hearing because she was giving birth. The judge ordered her deported anyway. No consideration for her circumstances. No opportunity to be heard. That child now has a newborn and is trying to reopen her case. But the system is so strained that we cannot promise her full legal representation. That is what the denial of due process looks like.

Our coalition has always stepped up to meet the moment, from the 2014 Central American refugee crisis to today's unprecedented influx of children. But this is the first time in over a decade that we are not sure if we can hold the line. Without meaningful investment, the very infrastructure that makes New York a national model for immigrant justice is at risk.

The federal government failed to protect these kids. The State failed to act. But New York City has an opportunity to lead.

This is not just a budget decision. It is a moral one. In addition to increased funding for UMFI, we join our partners in making the following recommendations to strengthen and expand the city's commitment to immigrant communities:

Maintain and Expand Funding for Immigration Legal Services

- Invest **\$60 million** in immigration legal services to ensure continuity and defend against escalating anti-immigrant policies.
- Invest **\$10 million** in restorative justice programs within immigrant communities that center healing and non-carceral solutions.
- Increase **\$34 million** for the **New York Immigrant Family Unity Program (NYIFUP)** to sustain representation of detained individuals.
- Increase and baseline **\$40 million** for the **Immigrant Opportunity Initiative (IOI)** to meet rising community needs.



- Establish a **\$25 million Citywide Rapid Response Fund** for emergency legal services, housing, and food assistance for families impacted by enforcement.

These young people need more than sympathy, they need protection, they need representation, and they need a city that is willing to fight for them.

Thank you for your ongoing leadership and advocacy and your continued commitment to immigrant youth in New York City.

In community,

Sierra Kraft

Executive Director, ICARE Coalition

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TESTIMONIAL LETTER TO THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL FISCAL YEAR 2026 EXECUTIVE BUDGET HEARINGS

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Hon. Alexa Aviles, Chair

May 27, 2025

Thank you to Chair Aviles and the Committee on Immigration for the opportunity to provide this testimonial letter. On behalf of Immigrant Justice Corps, my name is Lauren Migliaccio, and I am pleased to provide testimony on the New York City Council Fiscal Year 2026 Executive Budget. We are deeply grateful to the Immigration Committee for its longstanding commitment to funding critical legal services for New York City immigrants.

Immigrant Justice Corps (hereinafter “IJC”) is the country’s first and only legal fellowship program dedicated exclusively to meeting the need for high-quality legal assistance for immigrants fighting deportation and seeking a path to lawful status and citizenship. IJC’s goal is for legal representation to lift immigrants out of poverty, by helping them understand their rights, attain lawful status and access to secure jobs, quality health care and life-changing educational opportunities. Inspired by the Katzmman Study Group on Immigrant Representation, IJC galvanizes the country’s most talented law school and college graduates, places them with premier legal services providers and community-based organizations nationwide, leverages the latest



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technologies, offers in-depth and ongoing access to substantive as well as professional wellness trainings, and fosters a culture of creative thinking that produces new strategies to reduce the justice gap for immigrant families, ensuring that immigration status is no longer a barrier to social and economic opportunity.

Now, in our tenth year, IJC has trained and placed over 500 Fellows in support of our mission to increase both the quantity and quality of immigration legal services. While we are headquartered in New York City, our collective experience is national in scope, with Fellows placed at immigration legal service providers in 34 states, and the District of Columbia. In the past two years, we have trained and mentored over 150 Fellows as specialized children's attorneys working exclusively with unaccompanied immigrant children in over 30 states. We currently have more than XX Fellows placed with immigration legal services providers in New York City. 19of those Fellows exclusively serve vulnerable unaccompanied children who have already survived unimaginable trauma – violence, persecution, trafficking – and arrived at our border confused, frightened, and alone.

The need for funding for legal services for unaccompanied immigrant children in New York City has never been more urgent. On March 21, 2025, the federal government terminated its longstanding contract that provided funding for legal representation for unaccompanied children nationwide. This termination came despite a statutory obligation to fund legal services for unaccompanied children to the “greatest extent possible” and congressional appropriations for the program extending through 2026. While a District Court in Northern California has preliminarily



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enjoined the government from eliminating funding for this critical program, the termination announcement has already had devastating impacts on legal service providers and the unaccompanied children they serve. Legal services providers across the country and in New York City have been forced to lay off staff, pause their intakes, and turn children away from seeking the legal services they deserve.

Eliminating federal funding for legal representation for unaccompanied children will leave more than 26,000 vulnerable children—including more than a thousand here in New York—without legal counsel as they navigate the complex and high-stakes immigration system. The Department of Homeland Security referred a total of 98,356 unaccompanied children to the Office of Refugee Resettlement (“ORR”) in Fiscal Year 2024. During that same time, 6,956 children were released to New York state and 3,475 were released to New York City, where they are enrolled in our schools, live in our neighborhoods, and are part of our communities.

Unaccompanied children are among our city’s most vulnerable populations. Many have fled harrowing conditions in their home countries, including violence, sexual exploitation, forced labor, persecution, and extreme poverty. Some have been victims of trafficking and have endured long and dangerous journeys to the United States. They arrive in the United States alone, without a parent or guardian, and must navigate a complex legal system in a language they may not speak. Immigration law does not guarantee the right to a lawyer. According to the Vera Institute of Justice, children with attorneys are seven times more likely to win their immigration cases. Without representation, however, they must go to court alone and face a trained government attorney



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seeking deportation. Four out of five children who appear in court without a lawyer risk return to their home countries where they face continued molestation and trafficking.

The urgency for state and local funding is underscored by the U.S. House of Representatives recent budget reconciliation bill. If enacted, this proposal would dismantle core protections established under the bipartisan Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) and the Flores Settlement Agreement—cornerstones of our nation’s commitment to child welfare and due process. The bill would impose an unprecedented and punitive fee structure on unaccompanied children, including a \$5,000 fee for arriving at the U.S. border, \$8,500 in to be released from custody to a parent or legal guardian, and additional fees to seek asylum applications, work permits, and court continuances. These costs—totaling over \$15,000 in many cases—would effectively bar children from seeking humanitarian relief and reunifying with family. The bill would drive children into the shadows, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking, exploitation, and abuse by bad actors who prey on their desperation.

Often, a meeting with an attorney is a child’s first opportunity to tell their story. As Allison Baal, an IJC Fellow at Lutheran Social Services of NY, recently reflected after an intake with an unaccompanied child from Guinea: “He remarked that I was the first one to really listen to him since he came to the United States. He said that he had no one to turn to for help; no one to explain this complex immigration system to him. And that’s why he shared his story. I was just a stranger. And yet, he opened up. Because I was the first person to really listen and make him feel heard.”



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New York City has long been a national leader in providing legal services to immigrants. In 2014, City Council funding for the Immigrant Children Advocates Relief Effort (ICARE) established the country's first universal representation for children in removal proceedings. ICARE has proven that universal representation is both just and effective, inspiring other jurisdictions across the nation to provide legal representation for children. But the looming federal cuts threaten to undo this progress by ICARE and IJC in New York City and leave a gaping hole in the safety net for unaccompanied children. In the face of federal retrenchment, New York City must act decisively to safeguard these children. We urge the City Council to allocate funding to expand legal services in Fiscal Year 2026 to ensure that all unaccompanied immigrant children in New York City have child-centered, zealous, high-quality legal representation in immigration court and the best possible chance for a better life.

Respectfully submitted,

Lauren Migliaccio

Lauren Migliaccio
Director of Training and Legal Technical Assistance
Immigrant Justice Corps



New York City Council Committee on Immigration

Honorable Alexa Avilés, Chair, FY26 Executive Budget Hearing May 27, 2025

Testimony of Danae Silkiss, Senior Program Coordinator, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York (KCS)

Good afternoon, Chair Avilés and members of the committee. My name is Danae Silkiss, Senior Program Coordinator at KCS, which has served New York's Korean-American and immigrant communities since 1973. Our adult education programs provide free ESOL and citizenship preparation classes that help thousands of New Yorkers build skills for work, community, and daily life.

There are over 2.2 million adults in New York City with limited English proficiency or without a high school diploma, yet fewer than 3% can access adult literacy classes each year. In FY25, funding for DYCD's adult literacy contracts was cut from \$17 million to \$12 million, leaving fewer than half as many adults able to enroll. City Council discretionary funding helped fill some of the gap, but this support is not guaranteed year to year.

Now, with proposed federal cuts that could eliminate \$24.6 million for New York's adult literacy programs, the risk is even greater—more than 20,000 adults could lose their chance to learn and advance.

We urge the administration to double baseline DYCD adult literacy funding from \$12 million to \$24 million and the Council to maintain discretionary funding at \$16.5 million. We also support combining the Adult Literacy Initiative and Pilot Project into a single, reliable funding stream so these essential classes can continue without interruption.

Adult literacy education is foundational for opportunity, equity, and inclusion in our city. KCS urges you to make this investment and keep the door open for all New Yorkers.

Thank you for your attention.

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New York City Council Committee on Immigration

Honorable Alexa Avilés, Chair

FY26 Executive Budget Hearing

May 27, 2025

Testimony of Nicholas Kim, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York (KCS)

Good afternoon, Chair Avilés and members of the committee. My name is Nicholas Kim, and I serve as Program Coordinator at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York (KCS). For over five decades, KCS has provided critical services to immigrant and low-income communities across New York City, including adult education, youth leadership programs, workforce development, mental health services, and immigration assistance.

As a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), we stand in solidarity with over 40 organizations to ensure that adult learners, particularly immigrant New Yorkers, have access to high-quality, community-based education. Every year, KCS serves hundreds of students through our ESOL and workforce development programs, many of whom are parents striving to support their children's education and long-term success.

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Yet despite the urgent need, funding for adult literacy continues to fall short. Our ESOL classes are consistently oversubscribed, with long waitlists and limited capacity due to ongoing budget constraints. These constraints are not abstract—they impact real families and real futures. In FY25, the administration cut DYCD adult literacy funding from \$17 million to \$12 million, and that reduction remains in the FY26 Executive Budget.

Meanwhile, our students are being asked to do more with less. Many are working multiple jobs, caring for children, and navigating systems in a language they are still trying to learn. Access to English classes and GED prep isn't a luxury—it's a necessity. Without it, families remain locked out of educational, economic, and civic opportunities.

NYCCAL is calling on the administration to **double the baseline funding for adult literacy programs funded through DYCD from \$12 million to \$24 million**, restoring the cuts from last year and enabling programs to bolster and stabilize their services in a time of increased need and continuous threats to our communities. In addition, NYCCAL is **calling on the Council to maintain total discretionary funding for adult literacy education at \$16.5 million and to fold City Council Adult Literacy Initiative funding – and the Initiative-funded programs – into the City Council Adult Literacy Pilot Project**, creating one, single funding stream for all City Council adult literacy discretionary dollars.

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At KCS, we know firsthand that when you uplift adult learners, you uplift entire families. Children do better in school when their parents can help with homework or communicate with teachers. Families become more financially secure when adults can access training and stable employment. We urge the Council to see adult literacy not just as an education issue but as a children's issue, a family issue, and a future-of-New York issue.

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to ensuring no family is left behind in this year's budget.

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May 27, 2025

New York City Council
Committee on Finance and Committee on Immigration

Re: Executive Budget Hearing – Committee on Finance jointly with the Committee on Immigration

Dear Members of the Committees of Finance and Immigration:

Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) respectfully provides the following written comment for the New York City Council on the May 27, 2025 joint hearing on the Executive Budget between the Committees of Finance and Immigration

Founded in 2008, KIND is a 501c3 nonprofit organization providing free legal representation to unaccompanied immigrant children who enter the U.S. immigration system alone. In all of KIND's work, KIND envisions a world in which every unaccompanied child on the move has access to legal counsel and has their rights and well-being protected as they migrate alone in search of safety.¹ KIND's holistic approach helps to address these traumas and critical needs, improving the overall well-being of youth by fostering resilience and establishing better child-centered practices. KIND's Social Services Team works with its Legal Programs Team to connect KIND's young clients to needed resources in order to foster their safety and stability and helps children and their families adjust to a new country, language, home, and community. KIND provides free direct legal representation, pro bono mentoring, and social services coordination for unaccompanied children. Since 2009, KIND's New York City office has served unaccompanied children in all five boroughs.

KIND has been a member of Immigrant Children's Advocacy and Relief Efforts (ICARE) since 2016. As a collaborative of seven agencies, ICARE works to ensure that free, quality legal services for unaccompanied children are efficiently and effectively delivered in an accountable manner to New York City.

1) KIND's Recommendations

KIND provides the following recommendations related to its experience and work in providing legal and social services for unaccompanied children in New York City:

- Support full legal representation for unaccompanied children so that they do not have to face removal proceedings in immigration court alone;
- Renew and significantly increase the baseline funding for legal services through ICARE to the FY26 discretionary funding request of **\$6,297,250 and an additional \$5,400,000** to account for:
 - A new legal landscape decreasing protections and targeting unaccompanied children for increased ICE enforcement,

¹ For example, view KIND's blueprint addressing critical issues and policies impacting unaccompanied children that providing actionable recommendations for the U.S. government to enhance child protection and well-being. Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), "KIND Blueprint 2024: Practical Solutions that Protect Unaccompanied Children Seeking Safety," Sept. 2024, available at <https://supportkind.org/resources/kind-blueprint-practical-solutions-that-protect-unaccompanied-children-seeking-safety/>.

- the increased complexity and cost of delivery of services, and
- Instability of federal funding for unaccompanied children’s legal services.

Below, KIND provides more information on unaccompanied children and their needs that form the bases of our recommendations.

2) New York City’s Unaccompanied Immigrant Children and their Needs and Challenges

a) Unaccompanied children and their specific needs and challenges

A child is considered an “unaccompanied immigrant child” (unaccompanied child) if they enter the U.S. before the age of 18 without a parent or a legal guardian and without any lawful status. Most unaccompanied children have left their home countries fleeing violence, persecution, neglect, or abandonment. Unaccompanied children often have experienced Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). They often suffer high levels of trauma due to exposure to violence, persecution, death threats, physical and sexual assault, and trafficking that may occur in the home country, en route to the U.S., or upon release into the community. While some unaccompanied children remain detained by the federal government (specifically the Office of Refugee Resettlement or ORR), most are released to adult sponsors and family members, but with little, if any, support or coordinated services upon release.

Upon their release from ORR custody, unaccompanied children are rarely provided with case managers, social workers, or any support services. Because of the lack of post-release services and the children’s vulnerability to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and trafficking, it is essential that legal service providers work with a wide variety of social services, medical, and mental health partners in New York City to provide referrals and coordinate services.²

Immigration status greatly impacts these children’s well-being because lack of legal status is one of the greatest barriers to unaccompanied children being eligible for benefits and services, as well as providing a general sense of security for children to safely access education, health care, and other public services. Sponsors and family members of unaccompanied children may also have difficulty caring for them due to legal barriers. For example, the placement by ORR of an unaccompanied child with a sponsor does not give that sponsor any legal authority over the child. Unless the sponsor can obtain legal guardianship from a court, it often is difficult for the sponsor to enroll the child in school or consent to necessary medical care.

b) New York City a top destination for unaccompanied children

New York City is a top destination nationally for unaccompanied children. In FY 2023, more than 3,965 unaccompanied children were released to Bronx, Kings, New York, and Queens County from federal custody to family members and adult sponsors in New York City.³ In FY 2024, 3,475 unaccompanied

² See generally, Mark Greenberg, et. al., “Strengthening Services for Unaccompanied Children in U.S. Communities,” Migration Policy Institute, Jun. 2021, available at https://www.migrationpolicy.org/sites/default/files/publications/mpi-unaccompanied-children-services_final.pdf.

³ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement, “Unaccompanied Children Released to Sponsors By County – September 2023,” last accessed March 7, 2024, available at <https://www.hhs.gov/programs/social-services/unaccompanied-children-released-to-sponsors-by-county-september-2023.html>.

children were similarly released in the five boroughs.⁴ New York State continues to rank fourth among all states in the country receiving total released unaccompanied children.⁵

3) Need for Immigration Removal Defense Legal Services for Unaccompanied Children Greater Than Ever

a) Unaccompanied children require attorneys to help them fight removal proceedings and apply for immigration legal status

Upon release from federal custody, almost all unaccompanied children are served with Notices to Appear (NTAs)—the first step in the U.S. Government actively trying to initiate removal (deportation) proceedings and possibly deport them back to unsafe and even life-threatening situations. Most of these unaccompanied children have several forms of humanitarian immigration relief they are eligible to apply for. The burden remains on released unaccompanied children to obtain legal representation because they have no right to guaranteed counsel at the government's expense for their immigration matters, yet most cannot afford to hire private attorneys.

Data shows that: 1) immigration judges are almost 100 times more likely to grant legal relief for unaccompanied children with counsel than those without legal counsel,⁶ and recent federal reports indicate that it currently takes about a median of almost 3.5 years to complete an unaccompanied child's case.⁷

Immigration law, particularly for the removal defense of unaccompanied children, was already one of the most complex and technically demanding areas of practice. Attorneys must also be versed in appearing in removal proceedings in immigration court, and keep up with rapidly evolving federal court procedures, regulations, and laws.

b) Unaccompanied children are on the front lines of the mass deportation agenda

Immigration legal representation for unaccompanied children is more important than ever. The Department of Homeland Security recently announced that unaccompanied children are now a *focus* of increased immigration enforcement activity.⁸ In March, 10 ICE officers came to our teen client's residence and she was directed to appear for an ICE check in, at which time our client's toddler was served with papers to initiate removal proceedings against her. ICE has confirmed they are targeting 24,000 unaccompanied children who were previously released to sponsors in New York City to resume

⁴ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement, "Unaccompanied Children Released to Sponsors By County – September 2024," last accessed March 7, 2025, [Unaccompanied Children Released to Sponsors by County - September 2024 | HHS.gov](https://www.hhs.gov/immigration-and-asylum/refugees/unaccompanied-children-released-to-sponsors-by-county-september-2024).

⁵ U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement, "Unaccompanied Children Released to Sponsors By State," last accessed March 7, 2025, available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/orr/grant-funding/unaccompanied-children-released-sponsors-state>.

⁶ This figure based on EOIR data published in the report by William Kandel, "Unaccompanied Alien Children: An Overview," Congressional Research Service, Sep. 1, 2021, at p. 16-17, available at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/homesec/R43599.pdf>.

⁷ U.S. Department of Justice, Executive Office for Immigration Review, "Adjudication Statistics: Median Unaccompanied Alien Child (UAC) Case Completion and Case Pending Time, Generated on Oct. 12, 2023," last accessed Mar. 18, 2023, available at https://www.justice.gov/d9/pages/attachments/2018/05/09/30_current_median_uac_case_pending_time.pdf.

⁸ Marisa Taylor, Ted Hesson, and Kristina Cooke, "Trump officials launch ICE effort to deport unaccompanied migrant children," Reuters, Feb. 23, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/trump-administration-directs-ice-agents-find-deport-unaccompanied-migrant-2025-02-23/>.

initiation of removal proceedings against them. With the immigration court system already overburdened, and an average case for an unaccompanied child taking over 3.5 years to complete, this will create even worse backlogs in the system and demand that legal service providers remain attorneys of record and stretch limited resources even further.

In addition, children with willing sponsors in New York City are now being held in detention for months instead of a few weeks because their sponsors are unable to meet new ID and financial requirements. The reconciliation bill that just passed the House eviscerates protections for unaccompanied children and could charge as much as \$15,000 for many of them to be released from custody and apply for legal status, which would bar them from accessing protection.⁹ The administration is also seeking to end the Flores settlement that limits the amount of time children can be detained and requires they be held in safe conditions.¹⁰

c) Potential imminent loss and unstable federal funding for legal services for unaccompanied children

Against this backdrop, unaccompanied children in New York City are in dire need of secure, robust local funding for legal services, as the future of federal funding for this work remains very uncertain. In March, the federal contract that funded more than 50% of KIND's work was abruptly cancelled. In the weeks following, children who would have received KIND's advice and assistance under this contract no longer had access to counsel. This includes four children who decided to return to their home countries without parents or legal guardians to receive them. This includes a teen from West Africa who has been in foster care for 18 months, who confessed how scared and confused he was to suddenly have to attend court alone. This includes a four-year-old girl from Guatemala who was separated from her grandmother at the border.

After litigation was filed, and an injunction was entered, the federal funding for services was temporarily restored, but the administration continues to fight the case in court and signal its intent to take away all protections from unaccompanied children.

To meet this moment, it's clear that much more must be done at a local level to ensure that unaccompanied children remain out of detention and should not have to go to immigration court alone to fight their case pro se.

d) Creating and sustaining a legal representation program for unaccompanied children to protect New York City children

We commend City Council for its support of KIND and ICARE. However, during these uncertain times, creating a sustainable legal representation program requires the City to significantly raise the baseline of funding to account for the increased needs for providing expert, culturally-responsive, services for

⁹ [What's in the 2025 House Reconciliation Bill? Immigration and Border Security Highlights | American Immigration Council; KIND Denounces House Passage of Reconciliation Bill That Decimates U.S. Protection System for Unaccompanied Children - KIND](#)

¹⁰ [Trump administration seeks to end court settlement protecting migrant children in U.S. custody - CBS News](#)

unaccompanied children. While the needs and numbers of unaccompanied children arriving in New York have risen steadily in the past, ICARE’s funding has remained at a standstill for several years. Renewed, multi-year, and sustained funding with annual adjustments is necessary to create a sustainable pipeline of high-quality attorneys in the field in New York City and programming that addresses the gaps in legal services for the community. This also requires that New York City understand the professional obligations of attorneys, as well as investing in our organizations to recruit, train, and sustainably maintain multilingual, trauma-informed, immigration trained attorneys that are licensed to practice in New York state and can navigate both state and immigration court systems.¹¹

An attorney entering an appearance to a state court or immigration case must also consider their ethical and professional responsibilities to continue representing a child through the entire course of their case. As mentioned aforehand, federal data shows that this is a median of 3.5 years or more, which is likely to increase as more children enter the immigration court system. ICARE member organizations and attorneys cannot, in accordance with their professional responsibilities, simply beg off of cases when contracts for funding end. For these reasons, KIND has worked diligently with ICARE and its other members to build a sustainable legal representation program in New York City for unaccompanied children that consider these statistical realities and professional obligations that span multiple years of difficult and technically demanding legal work.

4) Provision of expert and specialized social services for unaccompanied children improves their legal outcomes and well-being

a) Unaccompanied children are often provided a patchwork of limited services and support for their integration into New York City

As discussed earlier, once these children have arrived in the United States, they are held in ORR custody, where they remain until they are released to adult sponsors and family members. Many unaccompanied children are released with little, if any, support or coordinated and localized services upon release.¹² Federal support services, if provided locally, usually end when the young person turns 18. The landscape of patchwork, limited support can negatively affect children’s well-being and their meaningful participation in their immigration case—and left undocumented, these children can continue to be placed in vulnerable scenarios. As service providers, we have seen the harm that is inflicted upon children when they are released to communities that fail to provide the supports that they need to fully integrate and thrive.

b) KIND assists unaccompanied children with various services needs that help their safety, well-being, and ability to meaningfully participate in their legal case

KIND works to assist clients with basic stability—a requirement for a child client to be able to meaningfully participate in their legal case. Aside from benefiting their legal case, this holistic service model can also help our child clients thrive in other settings as well, such as school, home, in peer

¹¹ Specifically, one of the primary forms of humanitarian relief that unaccompanied children qualify for is Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), which requires a license to practice in state court in order to first obtain an order before subsequent filing with U.S. Citizenship Immigration Services (USCIS) is possible.

¹² E.g., Jonathan Beier and Karla Fredricks, “Meeting the Medical and Mental Health Needs of Unaccompanied Children in U.S. Communities,” Migration Policy Institute and the American Academy of Pediatrics, April 2023, at page 24 24 in Box 3, available at <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/meeting-the-medical-and-mental-health-needs-of-unaccompanied-children-in-u.s.-communities>.

relationships, and other places. This type of individualized support that views the client as an entire person with needs outside of their immigration case is only possible when there is a dedicated, experienced social services professional working closely with an attorney together. Social services work itself involves multiple, complex systems.

Social services referrals that KIND has provided include but are not limited to: mental health assessments, housing services, medical services and accompaniments, school enrollment, educational support and career planning, IEP assessments for learning disabilities and difficulties, safety planning, assistance in reporting matters to law enforcement, emotional support through complicated family dynamics, DMV accompaniments, applying for IDNYC, and food access support, just to name a few.

c) Coordinated legal representation and social services can play a critical role in combatting labor exploitation and trafficking of unaccompanied children

Unaccompanied children and youth, particularly as they remain undocumented and in active removal proceedings, are uniquely placed in vulnerable situations that can lead to further harm. A series of articles in The New York Times reported on unaccompanied children working in exploitative and hazardous conditions.¹³ KIND's New York City office has served and continues to serve labor trafficked and exploited youth, and our Labor Exploitation Prevention Programs is working on know your rights materials, trainings, and advocacy on the issue.¹⁴ Ongoing investments in removal defense and immigration legal services for unaccompanied children remains one of the most effective ways for New York City to address child labor exploitation and trafficking. Addressing underlying complex and intersectional reasons that unaccompanied children may be labor exploited or trafficked requires solutions that increase these children's protective factors, such as increasing unaccompanied children's access to quality legal and social services by trusted attorneys and social workers. Attorneys are vital to unaccompanied children's comprehension of their legal rights, to securing these children's stability—and, where appropriate, lawful and safe employment—through immigration status, and to recognizing, and helping extricate children from, situations of exploitation. Social services providers can work with these youth to build on their protective factors and support them to access resources essential for the stability needed to safely engage in decisions about their education, work, and transition into adulthood. Without this coordination between legal and social services, unaccompanied children continue to face heightened vulnerability to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and trafficking in New York.

New York City is and can continue to be a national leader on the humane reception, welcome, and protection of unaccompanied children in the U.S. We appreciate the City Council's leadership in ensuring that all the unaccompanied children residing in New York City have the opportunity to thrive. We urge you to continue to keep the needs of these children and youth central in your efforts by supporting and sustaining coordinated legal and social services, and creating continuous partnership and dialogue between City agencies and service providers. Thank you.

Sincerely,

¹³ E.g., the first article published by Hannah Dreier, *Alone and Exploited, Migrant Children Work Brutal Jobs Across the U.S.*, The New York Times, Feb. 25, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/25/us/unaccompanied-migrant-child-workers-exploitation.html>.

¹⁴ To access these materials generally, see Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), "Preventing Child Labor Exploitation," available at <https://supportkind.org/what-we-do/preventing-child-labor-exploitation>, last accessed Oct. 17, 2024.

Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)

/s/

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/s/

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Sarah Nolan, Managing Director of KIND's New York City office Oral testimony provided at the hearing on May 27, 2025

- Good morning. My name is Sarah Nolan. I'm the Managing Director of Kids in Need of Defense or KIND's New York office. We are also here as a member of the Immigrant Children's Advocacy and Relief Effort, or the ICARE Coalition. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.
- KIND thanks City Council again for supporting ICARE in providing free legal representation to unaccompanied children. As a brief overview, unaccompanied children migrate to the US and enter federal custody because they are alone, under the age of 18, and without a parent or legal guardian at the time of entry into the US. New York City is home to thousands of unaccompanied children who are then released to an adult caregiver while their removal, or "deportation" cases, proceed in immigration court. Most of KIND's clients are eligible for a path to legal status because they have been abandoned, neglected, abused, or trafficked.
- We ask for City Council's increased support for ICARE's work to counter the relentless efforts to strip away legal protections for unaccompanied children, who are now on the front lines of the mass deportation agenda. ICE is conducting what they call "wellness checks" at homes, showing up with multiple armed ICE agents, with the intent to intimidate children and their sponsors. Children with willing sponsors in New York City are now being held in detention for months instead of a few weeks because their sponsors are unable to meet new ID and financial requirements. The reconciliation bill that just passed the House eviscerates protections for unaccompanied children and could charge as much as \$15,000 for many of them to be released from custody and apply for legal status, which would bar them from accessing protection. The administration is also seeking to end the Flores settlement that limits the amount of time children can be detained and requires they be held in safe conditions.
- Unaccompanied children in New York City are in dire need of secure, robust local funding for legal services, as the future of federal funding for this work remains very uncertain. In March, the federal contract that funded more than 50% of KIND's work was abruptly cancelled. In the

weeks following, children who would have received KIND's advice and assistance under this contract no longer had access to counsel. This includes four children who decided to return to their home countries without parents or legal guardians to receive them. This includes a teen from West Africa who has been in foster care for 18 months, who confessed how scared and confused he was to suddenly have to attend court alone. This includes a 4-year-old girl from Guatemala who was separated from her grandmother at the border.

- After litigation was filed, and an injunction was entered, the federal funding for services was temporarily restored, but the administration continues to fight the case in court and signal its intent to take away all protections from unaccompanied children. We cannot rely on federal funding to provide the foundation for a legal assistance program these children so desperately need, as data shows immigration judges are almost 100 times more likely to grant legal relief when an unaccompanied child is represented by counsel.
- Legal representation provided by KIND and ICARE members is the key to increased stability for unaccompanied children and safeguards them against human trafficking and exploitation. We respectfully ask that City Council at a minimum support the **\$6.3 million** in renewed funding requested by ICARE and allocate an additional **\$5.4 million** in funding given the increased needs and uncertain future of federal support. Additionally, we request renewal of the funding for the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI) that also supports our critical work.

Thank you for your commitment to ensuring that all unaccompanied children in New York City can remain safe and achieve their full potential.



**TESTIMONY OF DR. MEGAN FRENCH-MARCELIN, SENIOR DIRECTOR OF NEW YORK STATE POLICY
AT LEGAL ACTION CENTER
Committee on Criminal Justice Budget Hearing
May 27, 2025**

Thank you to Chairwoman Nurse and the esteemed members of the committee for this opportunity to testify. My name is Megan French-Marcelin, I am the Senior Director of Policy at the Legal Action Center. Today, I am testifying on behalf of the New York City Alternatives to Incarceration and Reentry Coalition, a network of 12 service organizations with decades of experience in providing holistic, community-based supports to justice-involved New Yorkers. Collectively, our programs serve more than 30,000 New York City residents each year.

Less than two weeks ago, a federal judge ruled that she would place Rikers Island jails under federal receivership, an action precipitated by the City's failure to address the jail complex's abusive conditions, including ongoing "violations of the constitutional rights of people in custody in the New York City jails."¹ While we await details of what, in practice, that might mean for ongoing operations on the island, we must also remember that Riker's is, by law, mandated to close in 2027. It is now more critical than ever that the City utilize every mechanism at their disposal to bring the population on Rikers down.

Fortunately, this city has an ecosystem of providers - who work in front-end Alternatives to Detention/Incarceration as well as back-end reentry services - who can help. These programs are some of the most meaningful mechanisms we have available to envision and scale a more comprehensive, holistic approach to public safety - one that ends our overreliance on mass incarceration and instead, invests in the human potential of our city's most marginalized residents.

These programs are not, however, simply about an ideal, they are effective, evidence-based interventions supported by decades of research. And that research clearly demonstrates that these programs are more successful than incarceration at improving public safety outcomes, decreasing the chance of future convictions, reducing homelessness and psychiatric hospitalizations, increasing connections to services, and inspiring civic engagement.

While we were heartened to see proposed cuts of nearly \$17 million to our programs restored in the Executive budget, our budgets have remained largely static as the city's overall corrections budget has grown exponentially. We cannot begin to ensure that our programs touch every eligible New

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/13/nyregion/rikers-island-receiver-nyc.html>

Yorker or are responsive to new and changing conditions if we cannot pay staff adequately, expand services to meet those new needs, or pilot new approaches.

I want to stress that when we invest in community-based programs, we not only invest in safer neighborhoods, we also save New Yorkers money. These programs build thriving communities at a fraction of the cost of city incarceration. In fact, a recent report from New York City's Comptroller estimates the cost of incarcerating one person on Rikers for one year is \$507,317. In contrast, ATIs *create* cost savings: studies estimate that for every \$1 spent on community-based ATIs, between \$3.46-\$5.54 in benefits are generated.²

It is why this year, the NYC ATI and Reentry Coalition is requesting an additional \$2.4 million in ATI Discretionary funds. These funds have been critical for our programs and the communities we serve because of their flexibility and responsiveness. With Council funds, our organizations are able to fill critical gaps and enhance services (and even pilot new programs) outside the bounds of restrictive contracts and RFPS that often leave both staff and services underfunded.

If we truly want to turn the tide of mass incarceration, we must invest in the scaling of these critical services. With additional dollars, the Coalition could operationalize many new initiatives while ensuring some of the ongoing programs that have been bolstered throughout the years with Council dollars. This includes:

- New funding would allow CASES to staff a new Manhattan misdemeanor part. CASES staff already carry caseloads of 100 or more participants, thus new funding would be essential to alleviate staff capacity and ensure high quality services.
- It would allow other providers who work in Queens and the Bronx to hire new clinical evaluators thus speeding up the currently delayed mental health evaluations in those borough's mental health courts and leading to an additional 120 evaluations completed annually.
- For exalt youth, new investments would allow for the organization to serve approximately 20 new justice-involved young people including providing access to education, mental health services, stipends, etc.

Thank you.

For further questions, please email Dr. Megan French-Marcelin at mfrenchmarcelin@lac.org or call at 617-869-1194

²Brinson, C., Gardener, T.M., Keegan, A., Klapholz, G. & Nikolic, S. (2022, January). *Transforming Criminal Legal System Outcomes in New York City: A Blueprint for NYC's Next Generation of Political Leaders*. Legal Action Center.



**Talking Points for the
City Council Committees on Immigration and Finance
Concerning FY '25 Budget**

My name is Luis Mancheno and I am the City-wide director of Immigrant Justice at Legal Services NYC, or LSNYC. I come here today to express my concern about the current status of funding for immigration legal services in NYC.

As the federal government has ramped up resources to move to separate New York families and deport our neighbors, the funding provided by City Council to provide legal representation to immigrant New Yorkers has remained unchanged for years.

Crisis is here now and it is the responsibility of City Council to provide for all New Yorkers affected by the draconian deportation efforts carried out by the Federal Government. However, Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI) contract terms have not changed to reflect these developments, with providers not even receiving COLA increases since FY20. The administration recently issued a new RFX for the IOI contracts, with no change in the total funding being provided. As a result, the case rates implicit in the RFX are quite simply insufficient for the work that is being contracted. As a result, the IOI providers are currently subsidizing the work performed under the contract by fifty percent, amount to **\$12.5 million** dollars of subsidies.

Without adequate and well-funded support from City Council, thousands of children in New York will be left without their parents, thousands of immigrant New Yorkers will be unable to defend their legal right to stay in this country, and even US citizens will potentially be deported because of lack of an immigration attorney to help them defend their right to Due Process.

New York has long been a beacon of hope for immigrants—a place where people from every corner of the globe have come seeking safety, opportunity, and the promise of a better life. It is a city built by immigrants, powered by diversity, and enriched by the contributions of newcomers. But today, that legacy is being tested like never before.

Across our state, and especially in our city, we are witnessing an influx of asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants fleeing war, political instability, climate disasters, and economic despair. They arrive here with hope—but also with fear and uncertainty. Many are navigating an

Demand Justice.

immigration system that is complex, overwhelming, and unforgiving. And far too many are doing it alone.

This is why **providing accessible, high-quality immigration legal services is not just a legal issue—it is a moral imperative.**

Let me be clear: **access to legal representation can mean the difference between deportation and safety, family separation and reunification, fear and freedom.** When immigrants are represented by legal counsel, their chances of receiving asylum or legal status increase exponentially. Programs like the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI) have demonstrated that **publicly funded legal representation works**—keeping families together and ensuring due process. But the current crisis demands we do even more.

We, legal service providers are stretched thin. Waitlists are growing. New arrivals are being placed into expedited removal proceedings with little understanding of their rights or the legal process. Children, families, and individuals who have already suffered so much are now facing additional trauma in the absence of legal support.

We cannot allow this to become the new normal.

We must invest in immigration legal services not as charity, but as justice. Not as a burden, but as an affirmation of our values. Supporting these services strengthens communities, upholds the rule of law, and preserves the integrity of our immigration system.

In this moment of crisis, we must choose compassion over indifference, action over inertia.

We urge that City Council prioritizes immigration legal services during FY26. The benefits of these services are literally lifesaving for New Yorkers and economically savvy for the pockets of the city.

Luis Mancheno
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**Joint Testimony for the
City Council Committees on Immigration and Finance
Concerning FY '25 Budget**

Chair Aviles, Council Members, and staff, thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony to concerning the extreme need for immigration legal services in New York City, the degree to which the current Immigrant Opportunity Initiative (“IOI”) contract is falling short, and the degree to which service providers are losing—or being threatened with the loss of—other funding currently used to subsidize the IOI contracts. For all these reasons, we ask that the Council partner with us to substantially increase funding for IOI providers and guarantee that New Yorkers in dire need of immigration legal services are able to access them.

Providers

This testimony is submitted jointly by Legal Services NYC, the New York Legal Assistance Group, the Legal Aid Society, and the Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative (CILEC).

Legal Services NYC (“LSNYC”) is the largest provider of civil legal services in the country. We have worked for more than fifty years to fight poverty and seek racial, social and economic justice on behalf of low-income New Yorkers. LSNYC provides a wide spectrum of immigration legal assistance, both in affirmative and defensive proceedings, at all stages of the immigration process. This includes full-service legal representation, particularly for asylum seekers, long-time residents of New York City and newly arrived individuals and families, as well as for individuals eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, u-visas, t-visas, and VAWA status. LSNYC also provides wrap-around services for low-wage workers, from representation in unemployment insurance proceedings and appeals; to administrative, state, and federal representation for workers seeking unpaid wages or overtime or who have been the victim of unlawful discriminatory practices.

The New York Legal Assistance Group (“NYLAG”) uses the power of the law to help New Yorkers in need combat social, racial, and economic injustice. We address emerging and urgent legal needs with comprehensive, free civil legal services, impact litigation, policy advocacy, financial counseling, and community education. NYLAG serves immigrants, seniors,

the home-bound, families facing foreclosure, renters facing eviction, low-income consumers, those in need of government assistance, children in need of special education, domestic violence survivors, persons with disabilities, patients with chronic illness or disease, low-wage workers, low-income members of the LGBTQ community, Holocaust survivors, veterans, as well as others in need of free legal services.

Legal Aid

The Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative (“CILEC”) is a consortium of 13 legal service providers and base-building organizations that work to strengthen low-income immigrant communities throughout New York City. Our member organizations deliver high quality employment- and immigration-related legal and wrap-around services to low-income immigrant New Yorkers, including both long-term residents of New York City, as well as those who are recently arrived. CILEC providers represent New Yorkers in myriad affirmative and defensive immigration cases and proceedings, and support workers seeking redress for the violation of their employment rights through representation before city and state agencies, and federal courts, and through advocacy directly with their employers. Our organizations also provide trainings to immigrant communities to disseminate reliable information in a time of fear and rapid change.

Need for Civil Immigration Legal Services

Our City has repeatedly noted its commitment to our immigrant communities. Legal services funding is essential to preserve the rights of immigrants and keep families from the harms of detainment, deportation, and more. We call for additional dollars to be allocated in the City budget for these services. Increased investment that supports innovative and flexible legal service programming to respond to the ongoing and emerging needs of our communities will give immigrant New Yorkers the chance to live, work, and thrive in our city.

The need for immigration legal services is enormous and critical as the federal government focuses its resources and power on arresting, detaining, and deporting millions of immigrants while simultaneously revoking and limiting access to status and documentation for millions more. Our neighbors are in very precarious financial and legal situations and are forced to navigate multiple government systems on their own, including the behemoth that is our deportation system. Many lawfully working and contributing to our communities, but with the current allocation of resources and funding, which is woefully inadequate to address the legal needs of immigrant communities, most are left unable to access critical legal services which would help them maintain their status and defend against arrest and deportation. Tens of thousands of vulnerable families have been left without assistance in meeting asylum filing deadlines, navigating the confusing immigration court system, and securing documentation to work and support themselves.

With many pathways to relief—temporary protected status, parole—cut off and many other pathways, such as asylum, severely curtailed, many immigrants served through this programming will not be eligible to file for status. Additionally, with new executive orders, directives, and legislation (Laken Riey Act), filing for immigration relief, even if eligible, carries

a greatly increased risk of detention and deportation for many. It is critical that immigrants receive competent, robust, and up-to-date information and legal guidance to navigate the challenges that they face. The need for representation and assistance in removal proceedings and to defend against deportation is great.

As Comptroller Brad Lander highlighted in a 2024 report, “[g]uaranteeing access to counsel in removal proceedings for all New Yorkers as well as making additional investments in immigration legal services can benefit New York City’s economy by keeping workers in the workforce, getting new arrivals work authorization, keeping families together, and providing pathways to upward mobility.”¹ Providing access to an attorney for all 53,000 New Yorkers currently facing removal proceedings would result in a \$8.4 billion net benefit to the City in tax revenue.² The cost of deportations on both a financial and social scale is significant. Deportations lead to foreclosures, evictions, greater reliance on social safety net services, and children entering the foster care system.³ Keeping immigrant families together contributes directly to increased tax revenue, economic spending, and strengths productivity. Immigrants are overrepresented in the labor force and dominate in essential work and the care economy.⁴

Despite the economic benefit of investing in immigration legal services and the demonstrated and increasing need, the current city budget for FY26 falls short. This budget fails to make the kind of proactive investments that are particularly important as the City faces funding and policy threats from the new federal administration. New York must enhance supports and protections for immigrant communities, including by substantially enhancing legal defense services for immigrant New Yorkers. With state budget falling \$36 million short of the estimated increased need for legal service (and \$64 million short for legal infrastructure, retention, and recruitment), we ask that the City step up to fill some of these funding gaps.

The Current Immigrant Opportunity Initiative (“IOI”) Contract Falls Short

The City’s current Immigrant Opportunity Initiative (“IOI”) contracts were entered into eight (8) years ago. Since then, not only has the scale of the need for immigration legal services grown, but so has the complexity of clients’ needs, particularly since the change of federal administration.

But the IOI contract terms have not changed to reflect these developments, with providers not even receiving COLA increases since FY20. The administration recently issued a new RFx for the IOI contracts, with no change in the total funding being provided. As a result, the case rates implicit in the RFx are quite simply insufficient for the work that is being contracted. As a result, the undersigned contracted providers are currently subsidizing the work performed under the contract by fifty percent, amount to **\$12.5 million** dollars of subsidies.

¹ Brad Lander, “Economic Benefits of Immigration Legal Services,” March 18, 2024. [Economic Benefits of Immigration Legal Services - Office of the New York City Comptroller Brad Lander](#).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ Facts, Not Fear: How Welcoming Immigrants Benefits New York City, New York City Comptroller (Jan. 2024), <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/facts-not-fear-how-welcoming-immigrants-benefits-new-york-city/>.

Yet, the award amount and the future programmatic changes that the City is considering mean that contracted legal services providers must handle **more** cases than they currently do in order to receive the same funding they have been getting since 2019. This is a step in the wrong direction. The contract has always been underfunded, but to ask providers to continually do more for the same funding, while inflation and personnel costs soar, is simply unfeasible. For providers to retain and hire the staff needed to perform high quality, impactful work, the award amount and case rate must be substantially increased and the annual award amounts must account for COLA increases over the life of the contract.

We ask that the City Council join us in asking the City administration to *fully fund* these contracts and provide fair and adequate pay for the services being performed, which means providing the contracted providers with at least \$12.5 million of additional funding, providing a higher implicit case rate (meaning that the extra money should *not* be offset with more deliverables, which would reduce us back to where we started), and the contract should include basic COLA increases over the life of the contract.

Other Funding is Under Threat or Has Been Withdrawn

Not only do contracted providers currently provide the City with millions of dollars in subsidies for these contracts, but the money we use to subsidize those contracts has been dwindling or is under threat. Many large federal immigration civil legal services contracts have been withdrawn or cancelled, including contracts to provide representation for unaccompanied minors and to provide naturalization clinics to people eligible for citizenship. There are virtually no other sources of funding to cover that work, leaving children defenseless against deportation and leaving people eligible for U.S. citizenship in limbo. Other sources of crucial federal funds are under threat, including funding which helps pay for the crucial infrastructure organizations need in order to provide services under the IOI contract.

We are also concerned about the City's termination of its own investment in its own limited scope immigration legal assistance, the Asylum Application Help Center (AAHC), and its satellite offices throughout the city, effective June 30, 2025. The City's removal of the AAHC from the immigration legal services ecosystem, without a redistributed infusion of support to existing legal service providers leaves many of these new migrants in highly volatile legal situations, without means to understand immigration policy changes or help to navigate through. Many new migrants will end up without means to help them reapply for employment authorization or other immigration benefits, will not understand their eligibility for immigration relief, and will also not be prepared to gird themselves against potential detention and removal from the United States during this federal administration. This is not the time to divest from community education and robust legal services. We must adapt, pivot, and respond to whatever comes our way.

Moreover, our client communities are being threatened with the loss of education funds, access to public benefits, and more, all of which makes it increasingly difficult to justify spending our limited flexible funds to subsidize underfunded City contracts.

New York City is an always has been a city of immigrants. As the federal government seeks to subvert due process and to detain and deport as many as it can, it is more important than ever that immigrants obtain access to legal representation. In the current federal immigration enforcement environment, it is truly the case that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, and helping people obtain immigration relief *before* they are detained can make all the difference.

We greatly appreciate all the support that the City Council has provided over the years and look forward to working in partnership during the coming years. Together, we can show the strength of the City and its ability to support our immigrant communities during times of immense need. We would welcome any opportunity to dialogue with you regarding the needs for immigrant communities in New York City.

Sincerely,

Christine Clarke, Chief of Litigation and Advocacy, Legal Services
NYC

Adriene Holder, Chief Attorney, Civil Unit, Legal Aid Society

Lisa Rivera, President & CEO, NYLAG

Antonia House, IOI Program Manager/CILEC Coordinator,
TakeRoot Justice



Make the Road New York
Testimony to Immigration Committee
5/27/2025
Written version

Good afternoon, Chair Avilés and Council Members. My name is Natalia Aristizabal, and I am a Deputy Director at Make the Road New York. On behalf of our 28,000+ members and staff, I thank the Committee for the opportunity to share our concerns with the FY26 budget and its impact on all immigrant New Yorkers.

Make the Road firmly believes in safeguarding dignity and fairness across our society. Over the years, the Council has done so much to ensure that New York continues to be a city that welcomes all, including immigrants.

In the face of horrifying anti-immigrant attacks, our communities need the Council's support more than ever before. The city must fortify, rather than undermine, the critical services and funding for our diverse communities and protect New Yorkers of all immigration statuses. We ask the Council to use every available tool to reverse the Mayor's attacks on immigrants and working-class New Yorkers of color. Federal immigration enforcement must not be allowed to come to our city and terrorize our people. The services that organizations like us provide are essential - we help New Yorkers keep their families together, learn English, access healthcare and so much more. Amid a historic housing, shelter, and cost-of-living crisis, we need to invest in communities and protect each other, and expand funding for critical services. We must not allow federal immigration enforcement to wreak havoc in our city.

Here are some examples of programs that we need to preserve and expand:

1) Immigration legal services: The City Council must expand and safeguard funding for the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative (RRLC), a collaboration of Make the Road, NYLAG and Unlocal. The RRLC is a unique program within the city's legal services ecosystem: it provides high-quality legal representation to individuals on the precipice of deportation. Last year, the mayor proposed cutting the RRLC's budget by about half, despite the uptick in demands for RRLC's services at the time. While temporary funding from this Council helped avert a crisis, the

program's future remains precarious. This instability could not come at a worse time, when immigrant communities across the boroughs are facing a concerted attack on their rights from a new Trump administration—from trying to end or constrain paths to legal status to reviving deportation processes that violate basic notions of due process.

Against that backdrop, demand for RRLC's services continues to soar daily. ICE continues expanding its aggressive tactics; in the past week, they detained people who were following ICE's instructions and attending mandatory immigration check-ins. This included an NYC Public School student named Dylan. They are detaining people who were not the intended targets of raids, such as **our client Adrian, a father of two from Brooklyn, who our attorney prevented from being deported to prison in El Salvador at the last minute** [see the [ABC News story here.](#)] These are the types of urgent cases that RRLC helps us take on.

With enforcement and deportation cases surging, the City Council must make a bold statement—**create a dedicated \$25 million rapid-response fund that would safeguard and expand the RRLC's funding, which should be baselined at the current overall funding level of \$1.65 million**, and address the cascade of crises families face during immigration enforcement actions, from housing instability to food insecurity. The Council should also meet this moment by fortifying and scaling up the City's immigration legal services infrastructure by **investing \$59 million in funding for immigration legal services to broaden access to legal representation and increase and baseline \$40 million for the Immigrant Opportunity Initiative.**

2) **Legal services for immigrant workers:** demand for these services is at all time highs while anti-immigrant rhetoric and federal policy threatens community well-being and funding levels remain stagnant or are at risk. The City must:

- **Renew and expand the Low Wage Worker Support (LWWS) Initiative to \$3M. That includes \$1.4M for the City-wide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative (CILEC), and \$362,750 for Make the Road.** This initiative enables legal service providers and CBOs like us to represent hundreds of workers to regain stolen wages, fight discrimination, and learn their rights.
- **Fully fund the Department Of Consumer And Worker Protection (DCWP) at \$2.5M For Workers' Rights Enforcement.** Worker protection agencies need the staff and resources to meaningfully enforce basic protections that vulnerable workers rely on, such as the right to paid sick leave, scheduling, and "just cause" protections for fast food workers. Without meaningful and adequately resourced enforcement, these protections are not real for immigrant workers in New York City.

- **Restore the budget for the City Commission on Human Rights to \$21 million.** For the past several years, the grossly underfunded Commission has been unable to enforce anti-discrimination laws due to their lack of adequate staff. At a time when we see rampant discrimination and federal agencies can not be counted on we need the City to have robust enforcement.
- **Renew Funding for the Job Training and Placement Initiative.** This program supports classes for members of unions, CBOs, and providers serving immigrants. Funding must include \$5,255,000 for the Consortium for Worker Education “Jobs to Build On” program, \$2,500,000 for Worker Service Centers and \$200,000 for Make the Road New York.

3) Housing: Our members and all New Yorkers deserve safe and dignified homes; the city must ensure that HPDs funding does not decline and that the [14% staff vacancy rate](#) is closed for effective department functioning. As federal efforts threaten to cut HPD funding (of which 69% comes from federal funding) the city must guarantee the survival of this department .

4) Adult literacy: Our city-funded adult English classes help immigrant New Yorkers find better jobs and help their kids in school. There are currently over 2.2 million adults in New York City with limited English language proficiency or who do not have a high school diploma. Yet combined city and state funding for adult literacy education is so limited that fewer than 3% of these New Yorkers are able to access ESOL, adult basic education (ABE), or GED classes in any given year. Given the Mayor’s incomprehensible cuts in FY25, and given the risk of further cuts or restrictions on federal funding for adult education that could profoundly impact the availability of services to New Yorkers, we support the recommendation of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL) that the city:

- **Double baseline funding for adult literacy programs funded through DYCD from \$12 million to \$24 million, and maintain total Discretionary funding for adult literacy education at \$16.5 million.**
- **Fold City Council Adult Literacy initiative funding- and the Initiative-funded programs - into the City Council Adult Literacy Pilot Project,** creating a single funding stream for all City Council adult literacy discretionary dollars (And maintaining funding levels for all current Initiative-funded programs.)

5) Failure to fund critical health initiatives would harm our communities’ health in a moment when immigrant New Yorkers are most vulnerable. MRNY relies on initiatives like Access Health and others to provide essential health access services to immigrant communities in NYC. Our full range of health access programs include SNAP and health insurance benefits outreach and

community education, enrollment, navigation and connection to wrap-around services. We offer programs that help to manage chronic conditions, such as asthma and diabetes, through our Community Health Worker services, and TGNCIQ health access services, which thousands rely on to meet their basic health needs. Cuts to Health + Hospitals could impact the health services our immigrant community members receive, for example, through NYC Care, because many are not eligible for health insurance and therefore rely heavily on Health + Hospitals to meet all their healthcare needs. In fact, the NYC Care program must be expanded to \$100M to continue meeting the health needs of immigrant families, and DSS/HRA's NYC Benefits program must maintain \$9.75M in funds per year.

6) All children and families in our communities deserve safe, supportive, well-resourced public schools. School districts are responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of ALL their students. Schools can and should be stabilizing forces in the lives of immigrant students, offering safety, belonging and hope in the face of uncertainty. As the federal government moves toward dismantling the US Department of Education with the devastating potential of slashed funding and protections for the most vulnerable students, we need the city to fully fund our public schools.

We're pleased that the Executive Budget includes \$14M for Community Schools and other programs that had been at risk of cuts. However, the executive budget leaves out Student Success Centers entirely - we need to restore \$3.3M for this vital peer-led college access program that increases college acceptance rates and a culture of college readiness, for immigrant students and students of color who lack other college access resources. While the Executive Budget rightly baselined \$6M for restorative justice programs, the city must baseline the full \$12M. These are programs that Make the Road members fought for and are now implementing on the ground. And without long-term funding, programs struggle to hire and keep staff, and students and families are left uncertain what services they will receive. With 1 in 9 students experiencing homelessness, rising mental health needs, and the growing attacks on Black, immigrant and trans students and schools, this is not the time to let these vital services be cut. Immigrant youth should be able to focus on school - not on whether they will be deported. Trans youth should be able to focus on school - not on whether their civil rights will be stripped away. We also need \$5M for the Mental Health Continuum.

Also, as a reminder of what our youth members have been saying for years - police in school don't make them feel safe. We spend more than \$400M to police students in schools, yet interactions with police can put youth on track to deportation or prison. We need to redirect resources to restorative justice, mental health, and other staff and practices that help students learn and thrive. This includes putting in place an immediate freeze on hiring of any new school

police - the safest schools have the most resources, not the most police. We must invest in student care, not criminalization.

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Many additional City Council initiatives help the city meet urgent needs of immigrant New Yorkers by sustaining the services that Make the Road and other organizations provide. We request the Council's support on the following in FY26:

- Securing \$300,000 for Make the Road under the **Speaker's Initiative** for wraparound legal, health, and educational services, plus \$75,000 under the Speaker's Initiative to supplement our Support for Persons Involved in the Sex Trade initiative funds for vital outreach to this extremely vulnerable community.
- **Renewing the Speaker's Protect NYC Families initiative** and increase Make the Road's funds to \$100,000 to help us protect our communities from unprecedented federal attacks.
- Renewing **Legal Services for Low Income Immigrants** at 1.2M and \$658,214 for Make the Road NY, as part of the 1.65M for the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative mentioned above.
- Renewing **Legal Services for the Working Poor** funding and allocate \$165,900 to Make the Road to provide free, culturally competent legal services in employment, public benefits, housing, and more.
- Expanding the **Access Health Initiative** to \$4M (\$110,000 to Make the Road), and allocating \$2.36M in funding for the MCCAP Initiative (\$76,218 to Make the Road), to bring Make the Road more in line with other MCCAP providers, as we are the highest performing group in the initiative but receive among the least.
- Maintaining FY25 levels of funding for the **Ending the Epidemic, Immigrant Health, and Food Pantries initiatives**.
- **Renewing the Adult Literacy Pilot Project** and \$449,000 for Make the Road, as part of renewing \$16.5M in Council funding for adult literacy education and increasing DYCD adult ed funding overall to \$24M.

Thank you for standing up for these vital services to support immigrants and working-class New Yorkers through this historically difficult moment.



**Immigration and Finance City Council Hearing
May 2025**

Testimony of Nilbia Coyote

Executive Director, New Immigrant Community Empowerment (NICE)

New York City Council Immigration Hearing

May 27, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Aviles, Chair Brannan and members of the City Council Immigration & Finance Committees, and fellow New Yorkers.

My name is **Nilbia Coyote**, and I am the Executive Director of **New Immigrant Community Empowerment (NICE)**, a community-based organization in Queens that is dedicated to nurturing the spirit of all immigrants and supporting the power and potential of immigrant workers—new New Yorkers and long-standing members of our city who are too often left behind.

I am here today to speak about the essential role of our **Pre-Apprenticeship for Life and Work Program**, and to urge the City to continue and strengthen its commitment to organizations like NICE through stable and timely contract funding, particularly Workforce Development Initiatives such as the Day Laborer Workforce Initiative, Immigrant Gender Equity, Construction Site Safety Initiative; Adult Literacy Pilot Project, Welcome NYC and Legal Services such as Low Wage Workers Support Initiative, among many others.

Our **Pre-Apprenticeship for Life and Work Program** provides immigrant New Yorkers with what they need most: real access to opportunity. We prepare individuals—most of them low-wage workers and often excluded from traditional workforce systems—for union apprenticeships, skills certifications, and career pathways in growing industries like construction, green jobs, and building maintenance. We do this in a culturally responsive, linguistically appropriate, and worker-centered way.

But this program is not just about skills—it's about **dignity, mobility, and survival**. Every week, I meet with participants who are navigating multiple barriers: language, immigration status, lack of health services options, discrimination, and economic hardship. They are newly arrived immigrants, day laborers, domestic



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workers, and job seekers—people who keep this city running but who are constantly fighting to stay afloat.

Because beyond job training, we equip our participants with **critical life skills** that are essential for surviving—and thriving—in this city. These are the things that no one talks about, yet they determine whether a person can fully participate in society: understanding how to navigate the transportation system, access health services and insurance, manage finances and open a bank account, pursue education for themselves or their children, find safe housing, and use digital tools and technology.

In addition to workforce and like skills development, NICE provides **critical legal education and support services** to help our community members navigate an increasingly hostile environment. Every day, we offer **Know Your Rights workshops**—in multiple languages—to ensure immigrants understand their protections under labor, immigration, and criminal justice systems. These sessions are not theoretical; they are tools for survival. Whether it's a worker facing wage theft, or someone targeted by immigration enforcement, our legal empowerment work helps them recognize abuse, assert their rights, and access support. In this moment, when immigrant communities are under extreme harm—politically scapegoated, economically exploited, and socially excluded—these legal services are essential to **protect lives, prevent exploitation, and build collective power**. NICE is often the first and only place people can turn to for information, safety, and justice.

For them, NICE is a lifeline. And the **Pre-Apprenticeship for Life and Work Program** is often their first step toward a more stable future.

We are deeply proud of the impact of our program. However, I must be honest: our ability to continue delivering these results is under threat.

We call on the City Council to:

1. **Ensure full and continued funding** for immigrant-serving workforce programs, language access, welcoming new immigrants, legal services, health services etc. In total over \$1.8 million for NICE in different awards.



**Immigration and Finance City Council Hearing
May 2025**

2. **Expedite reimbursements** and budget approvals so that nonprofits are not forced to carry the cost of City services.
3. **Center immigrant and worker-led organizations** in the design and funding of workforce development initiatives, particularly those that serve undocumented and low-income New Yorkers.

On behalf of NICE and the immigrant workers we serve, I thank you for your time and your leadership.

Gracias.

Nilbia Coyote



Testimony by New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)

Before the NYC Council Committee on Hospitals regarding:

Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2026

May 27, 2025

Chair Avilés, Council Members, and staff, thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Immigration Committee about the Executive Budget for Fiscal Year 2026. My name is Julie Brandfield, and I am the Interim Director of LegalHealth at the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG). NYLAG uses the power of the law to help New Yorkers in need combat social, racial, and economic injustice. We address emerging and urgent legal needs with comprehensive, free civil legal services, impact litigation, policy advocacy, and community education. NYLAG serves immigrants, seniors, the homebound, families facing foreclosure, renters facing eviction, low-income consumers, those in need of government assistance, children in need of special education, domestic violence survivors, persons with disabilities, patients with chronic illness or disease, low-wage workers, low-income members of the LGBTQ community, Holocaust survivors, veterans, as well as others in need of free legal services.

LegalHealth is the nation's largest medical-legal partnership that provides general legal assistance in the healthcare setting to patients of hospitals and community health facilities. We are in over 38 hospitals or health clinics, including all the public hospitals throughout New York City and their Gotham sites. Our medical legal partnership can be the crucial link for H+H patients to receive lifesaving care such as transplants available only at private institutions and discharge to the community with home care or to long term care. Receipt of lifesaving care improves individual lives and often enables those individuals to return to the workforce and support their families and loved ones. More timely discharge from hospitals, frees beds for individuals in need of acute medical care.

We are thankful for the Council's continued investment in our most vulnerable neighbors. Today, we are submitting testimony to ask for your continued and expanded Support for Legal Services in Hospitals through the Immigrant Health Initiative.

The City's current Immigrant Health Initiative ("IHI") funding levels have remained the same since FY23. This initiative supports programs that decrease health disparities among foreign-born New Yorkers by providing access to care by improving access to health care, addressing cultural and language barriers, and targeting resources and interventions. NYLAG is fortunate to have received funding through this initiative, which allows us to provide legal services to immigrant patients seeking medical care for severe and/or life threatening illnesses. The work can be the crucial link for H+H patients to receive lifesaving care such as transplants available only at private institutions and discharge to the community with home care or to long term care.

To expect providers to continually do more for the same funding, while inflation and personnel costs soar, is simply unfeasible. For providers to retain and hire the staff needed to perform high quality, impactful work, funding must be substantially increased and the annual award amounts must account for COLA increases as programming continues year after year. We ask that the City Council increase funding for IHI and provide fair and adequate pay for the vital services being performed.



**New York City Council
Finance Committee and Committee on Immigration**

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL FISCAL YEAR 2026
EXECUTIVE BUDGET HEARING**

**Testimony of the New York Immigration Coalition
May 27, 2025**

Good Day, Chair Brannan, Chair Aviles, and Honorable committee members of the Finance and Immigration Committees. My name is Robert Agyemang, and I am the Vice President of Advocacy for the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), an umbrella policy and advocacy organization that works statewide with over 200 immigrant-serving members and partner organizations. Thank you for making a space for immigrant facing organizations to speak on the impact of the proposed executive budget.

As the City Council enters the last stages of the budget negotiations, it does so in the context of growing attacks from the federal government. For the past several months, New York City has been subjected to unprecedented pressure and overreach, ranging from clawing back funds dedicated to providing life-saving services to asylum seekers to the use of harmful immigration enforcement tactics such as policing, detention, and deportation targeting immigrant communities.

The executive budget also neglects critical funding for health, language access, and adult literacy services that immigrant communities rely on. While it partially restores some of the early child care funding previously stripped out by his own initial preliminary budget, it does not align with the Council's bold vision for an expanded and ambitious Promise NYC program reflective of working families' needs. Notably, the Mayor's proposal fails to ensure that housing investments are inclusive of all New Yorkers, regardless of their immigration status.

Language Access remains a critical need in this city. While working with our dedicated colleagues from African Communities Together, MASA, Asian American Federation and Haitian Americans United for Progress, there have been some strides made with the worker-owned language services cooperatives towards addressing some of the communities who are often unnoticed and left in the dark to figure things out on their own. The Community Interpreter Bank is continuing to forge ahead and its first cohort of trained interpreters will be complete by mid June, with medical interpretation being completed towards the end of June. With partnerships with La Colmena, Mixteca, NICE and I-ARC, we have done rounds of outreach and are set to introduce many more community members to the interpretation landscape. We still need serious investment into the Language services infrastructure, to



continue to capitalize on progress of the coops and the bank, and expand the pool of interpreters, the languages and the offerings that allow this program to be the most unique and comprehensive project, specifically suited and tailored to the needs of NYC communities. We are requesting **baseline funding of \$7.8 million for the Language Access Workforce Initiative** to sustain the development and operations of the NYC Community Interpreter Bank, and support the growth of worker-owned Language Service Cooperatives, ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to high-quality interpretation and translation services. We believe baselining the funding for the initiative will allow for the necessary continuity, development and growth of the programs.

New York City deserves a budget that upholds the safety, dignity, and economic opportunities of every person who calls New York City home, whether they arrived here 30 years ago or 30 days ago. A budget that stands on our shared values and vision for New York City.

In a time of unprecedented attacks on the values that define our city, our commitment must remain steadfast. Now is the time to enact a bold budget, a people's budget that responds to the urgent needs of New Yorkers who are bearing the brunt of the affordability crisis, looming federal budget cuts, and the criminalization of Black and Brown communities.

The NYIC strongly urges the City Council to stand in solidarity with their communities and fully restore the funding and programs that support them so that they can uplift our city by:

- **Investing \$60 million in funding for immigration legal services** to ensure continuity of services and to help defend immigrants against ongoing aggressive, anti-immigrant policies.
- **Increasing funding to \$34 million for the NY Immigrant Family Unity Program (NYIFUP)** to sustain and support representing detained individuals.
- **Increasing and baselining \$40 million in Immigrant Opportunity Initiative (IOI)** funding to meet the needs in immigrant communities.
- **Allocating \$25 million to establish a Citywide Rapid Response Fund** to provide emergency immigration legal services, housing, and food assistance to families impacted by immigration enforcement actions.
- **Investing \$11 million in legal services for Unaccompanied Minors and Families to ensure** the continuity of critical legal services for immigrant children and asylum-seeking families.
- **Baselining increased funding of \$7.8 million for the Language Access Workforce Initiative** to sustain the development and operations of the NYC Community Interpreter Bank, and support the growth of worker-owned Language Service Cooperatives, ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to high-quality interpretation and translation services.



- **Renewing and expanding funding for Access Health NYC at \$4.5 million** so that CBOs and community health centers on the frontlines of the pandemic response can continue educating communities about health access, coverage, and rights, specifically our newcomers and asylum seekers.
- **Fighting back against the Mayor's 30- and 60-day shelter rule** by expanding the CityFHEPS voucher program so that all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status, can access life-saving housing support.
- **Increasing funding for the Promise NYC child care program to \$60 million** to provide community-based subsidized child care for immigrant children who otherwise cannot access existing alternatives.
- **Fully restoring \$222M in funding for 3-K and Pre-K programs**, the only free early childhood education and care available to many immigrant families. These programs are linked to better academic outcomes, less engagement with the criminal justice system, and greater ultimate financial stability for children who go through these programs.
- **Investing \$4 million in the Immigrant Family Communications and Outreach Initiative.** This essential funding helps New York Public Schools provide critical school-related information to immigrant families with varying literacy levels and access to digital media.
- **Investing \$24 million through DYCD in funding for Adult Literacy programs** to address gaps in digital literacy, systems navigation skills, and access to critical, family-stabilizing information.
- **Maintaining \$16.5 million for the Adult Literacy Pilot and the City Council Adult Literacy Initiative**, and folding the City Council Adult Literacy Initiative funding and the Initiative-funded programs into the City Council Adult Literacy Pilot Project to create a unified funding stream.

These critical investments in our communities must also be supplemented by meaningful policy solutions and investments, including:

- **Pass Introduction 214, the NYC Trust Act**, which would create a private right of action, allowing immigrant New Yorkers to take legal action if our laws violate them.
- **Support Resolution 717**, which calls on the State Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign the Access to Representation Act, extending the right to counsel to individuals facing immigration court proceedings.
- **Pass Introductions 431, 47, 408, 24** to ensure access to street vendor licenses and permits, reduce the criminal liability on food and merchandise vending, create a division to assist street vendors, and update sitting rules.
- **Support Resolution 0020-2024**, to urge the state to revise regulations and facilitate the establishment of a Municipal Public Bank in New York City.



The NYIC urges the Council to stand with us as a partner, ensuring that the rights and dignity of all New Yorkers remain at the heart of this year's budget. In order to meet the overwhelming and unmet needs of New Yorkers, whether they've been here 30 years or 30 days, we must act boldly and strategically, not reactively. Now is the time to ensure that our investments are protected, our people are taken care of, and that we maintain and sustain the services that allow us to remain a city of opportunities, a place where the promise of a better life is real for everyone who calls New York City home.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Submitted by:

Robert Agyemang
Vice President of Advocacy
New York Immigration Coalition



**New York City Council
Finance Committee and Committee on Immigration**

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL FISCAL YEAR 2026
EXECUTIVE BUDGET HEARING**

**Testimony of the New York Immigration Coalition
May 27, 2025**

Hola, buenos días, good morning, everyone. My name is Vladimir Tlali, and I am the Senior Policy Strategist at the New York Immigration Coalition, an umbrella policy and advocacy organization that works statewide with over 200 immigrant-serving members and partner organizations. Thank you, Chair Avilés, Chair Brannan, and members of the Finance and Immigration Committees, for convening this important hearing and allowing us to submit testimony on the organization's budget and policy priorities for the upcoming fiscal year.

As the City Council enters the last stages of the budget negotiations, it does so in the context of growing attacks from the federal government. For the past several months, New York City has been subjected to unprecedented pressure and overreach, ranging from clawing back funds dedicated to providing life-saving services to asylum seekers to the use of harmful immigration enforcement tactics such as policing, detention, and deportation targeting immigrant communities.

Instead of standing for our shared sanctuary values and legislation, Mayor Adams has often echoed the hostile narrative of the Trump administration. Rather than supporting hardworking immigrant New Yorkers as they deserve, Mayor Adams' budget fails to invest in a safer and more welcoming city for all. Moreover, in an attempt to trade away the values of our city, he tried to use immigrant New Yorkers as a bargaining chip in a quid pro quo to support the Trump Administration's inhumane immigration agenda in exchange for his federal corruption charges being dropped. However, that effort failed because the people of New York and the City Council said no. No to increased collusion with federal immigration enforcement. No to turning our city into a detention to deportation pipeline.

New York City does not deserve that. Our city deserves leadership that centers people in all budget and public policy choices and embodies a community spirit and collaboration between elected officials and advocates. Immigrant communities deserve a budget that upholds the safety, dignity, and economic opportunities of every person who calls New York City home, whether they arrived here 30 years ago or 3 days ago.



Since 2022, New York City has been a critical sanctuary for more than 233,000 asylum seekers and refugees, many of whom have endured unimaginable hardship to seek safety here. Yet, Mayor Adams' "Best Budget" falls far short of meeting their urgent needs. His Executive Budget drastically eliminates funding for asylum seeker centers and significantly reduces funding for immigration legal services, leaving thousands of newly arrived New Yorkers without support. This underfunding comes at a time when the demand for legal assistance has surged due to increased federal enforcement actions, including sudden status revocations and detentions of immigrant New Yorkers who are the backbone of our economy and the fabric of our identity as a city of opportunities.

Mayor Adams' budget also neglects critical funding for health, language access, and adult literacy services that immigrant communities rely on. While it partially restores some of the early child care funding previously stripped out by his own initial preliminary budget, it does not align with the Council's bold vision for an expanded and ambitious Promise NYC program reflective of working families' needs. Notably, the Mayor's proposal fails to ensure that housing investments are inclusive of all New Yorkers, regardless of their immigration status.

In a time of unprecedented attacks on the values that define our city, our commitment must remain steadfast. Now is the time to enact a bold budget, a people's budget that responds to the urgent needs of New Yorkers who are bearing the brunt of the affordability crisis, looming federal budget cuts, and the criminalization of immigrant communities.

NYIC strongly urges the City Council to stand in solidarity with their communities and fully restore the funding and programs that support them so that they can uplift our city by:

- **Investing \$60 million in funding for immigration legal services** to ensure continuity of services and to help defend immigrants against ongoing aggressive, anti-immigrant policies.
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- **Increasing and baselining \$40 million in Immigrant Opportunity Initiative (IOI)** funding to meet the needs in immigrant communities.
- **Allocating \$25 million to establish a Citywide Rapid Response Fund** to provide emergency immigration legal services, housing, and food assistance to families impacted by immigration enforcement actions.
- **Investing \$11 million in legal services for Unaccompanied Minors and Families to ensure** the continuity of critical legal services for immigrant children and asylum-seeking families.
- **Baselining increased funding of \$7.8 million for the Language Access Workforce Initiative** to sustain the development and operations of the NYC Community Interpreter Bank, and support the growth of worker-owned Language Service



Cooperatives, ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to high-quality interpretation and translation services.

- **Renewing and expanding funding for Access Health NYC at \$4.5 million** so that CBOs and community health centers on the frontlines of the pandemic response can continue educating communities about health access, coverage, and rights, specifically our newcomers and asylum seekers.
- **Fighting back against the Mayor's 30- and 60-day shelter rule** by expanding the CityFHEPS voucher program so that all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status, can access life-saving housing support.
- **Increasing funding for the Promise NYC child care program to \$60 million** to provide community-based subsidized child care for immigrant children who otherwise cannot access existing alternatives.
- **Fully restoring \$222M in funding for 3-K and Pre-K** programs, the only free early childhood education and care available to many immigrant families. These programs are linked to better academic outcomes, less engagement with the criminal justice system, and greater ultimate financial stability for children who go through these programs.
- **Investing \$4 million in the Immigrant Family Communications and Outreach Initiative.** This essential funding helps New York Public Schools provide critical school-related information to immigrant families with varying literacy levels and access to digital media.
- **Investing \$24 million through DYCD in funding for Adult Literacy programs** to address gaps in digital literacy, systems navigation skills, and access to critical, family-stabilizing information.
- **Maintaining \$16.5 million for the Adult Literacy Pilot and the City Council Adult Literacy Initiative,** and folding the City Council Adult Literacy Initiative funding and the Initiative-funded programs into the City Council Adult Literacy Pilot Project to create a unified funding stream.

These critical investments in our communities must also be supplemented by meaningful policy solutions and investments, including:

- **Pass Introduction 214, the NYC Trust Act,** which would create a private right of action, allowing immigrant New Yorkers to take legal action if our laws violate them.
- **Support Resolution 717,** which calls on the State Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign the Access to Representation Act, extending the right to counsel to individuals facing immigration court proceedings.
- **Pass Introductions 431, 47, 408, 24** to ensure access to street vendor licenses and permits, reduce the criminal liability on food and merchandise vending, create a division to assist street vendors, and update sitting rules.



- **Support Resolution 0020-2024**, to urge the state to revise regulations and facilitate the establishment of a Municipal Public Bank in New York City.

The New York Immigration Coalition urges the Council to stand with us as a partner, ensuring that the rights and dignity of all New Yorkers remain at the heart of this year's budget. In order to meet the overwhelming and unmet needs of New Yorkers, whether they've been here 30 years or 30 days, we must act boldly and strategically, not reactively. Now is the time to ensure that our investments are protected, our people are taken care of, and that we maintain and sustain the services that allow us to remain a city of opportunities, a place where the promise of a better life is real for everyone who calls New York City home.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Submitted by:

Vladimir Tlali
Senior Policy Strategist
New York Immigration Coalition



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**Testimony of Sophie Dalsimer, Co-Director of Health Justice at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest to the New York City Council Committee on Immigration
May 27, 2025, regarding the New York City FY26 Budget**

My name is Sophie Dalsimer, and I am Co-Director of the Health Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI). Thank you Chair Avilés and members of the Council for the opportunity to testify today.

The Trump administration poses an unprecedented threat to the rule of law and to New Yorkers' freedoms, civil rights, access to public services, and access to a healthy environment. New York City legislators must now leverage the substantial power of local government to uphold and protect our laws and rights, and to make the major investments needed to protect and strengthen infrastructure, public institutions, and the renewable energy economy.

The threats are particularly acute for New York City's immigrant communities and many mixed-status families who are being terrorized by the Trump administration's hateful rhetoric and harsh enforcement policies. That we must face these attacks at the same time as our hard-fought sanctuary protections are being violated, challenged, and threatened by our own mayor and agencies is a shocking betrayal of the people whose love and labor help make our city great and our communities strong. New York City legislators can and must invest in the programs that reassure and protect immigrant New Yorkers for the benefit of us all.

NYLPI is privileged to be a part of the City Council's Immigrant Health Initiative (IHI), and we thank you for that support. This initiative has supported NYLPI programs aimed at improving the health and well-being of immigrant New Yorkers and their families through direct immigration representation, litigation, community education, medical-legal partnerships including with local doctors and public hospitals, and non-legal advocacy. Through vigorous client and community advocacy and wraparound services, NYLPI improves health outcomes, increases access to healthcare, and provides critical and timely education for communities, healthcare providers, and legal service advocates.

Today we ask the Council to restore and enhance funding for the IHI, which has saved lives and improved health across our city. This work takes on heightened urgency in the face of a hostile federal administration and lack of mayoral leadership where adverse immigration actions can be a matter of life or death. Due to the growing and ever-changing complexity of immigration cases and the challenges placed on immigration processes, especially given the arrival of thousands of migrants to the City in recent years and a hostile federal administration, **we are seeking a \$650,000 allocation from the City Council's Immigrant Healthcare Initiative in CFY 2026.**

This request includes the \$435,504 allocated in CFY 2025, plus an enhancement to support the increase in need from the previous fiscal year.

New York City's FY 2026 Budget

The Independent Budget Office and State Comptroller DiNapoli have both found that New York City's economic outlook remains strong and project significant budget surpluses for FY 2025.

In recent years, the City Council has played a critical role in defending vital city services, investments, and infrastructure from budget cuts and flatlining.

The federal administration – hostile to immigrants, LGBTQ New Yorkers, and climate science - has already begun to seize funds allocated to our City. It is more critical than ever that the City's budget makes bold investments in public services, legal representation, and the transition to a local renewable energy economy, and it is more critical than ever that our Mayor stand up for New York City's communities and independence.

Immigrant Health Initiative

We ask the Council to continue and enhance support for the Immigrant Health Initiative, which continues to save lives and improve health across our city. This program is funded at \$2.43M in FY25 and supports more than 20 organizations, including NYLPI programs aimed at improving the health and well-being of New Yorkers and their families through direct legal representation, litigation, community education, strategic partnerships with public hospitals, and non-legal advocacy. Through vigorous client and community advocacy and wraparound services, NYLPI improves health outcomes, increases access to healthcare, and provides critical and timely education for communities, healthcare providers, and legal service advocates.

Such access to essential healthcare often results in cost savings for the City, the State, and our safety net health care system when people are able to resume work and productive lives.

As increasing numbers of New Yorkers are detained in immigration jails, we are one of few organizations focused on medical advocacy and the acute health hazards of immigration detention. In addition, in the face of continued attacks on the asylum process, we have offered culturally competent legal representation, including to those who identify as transgender, gender-expansive, or live with HIV. In addition, we continue to be a trusted resource for immigrants in NYC who have serious medical conditions or disabilities through holistic direct legal representation, litigation, community education, strategic partnerships with public hospitals, and non-legal advocacy.

As we start the new City Council term, NYLPI would like to underscore the work we have implemented across the City since the inception of the Council's Immigrant Health Initiative. This funding has allowed our efforts to continue without pause and respond to ever-increasing need. Due to the growing and ever-changing complexity of immigration cases and the challenges placed on immigration processes, especially given the arrival of thousands of migrants to the City in recent years and a hostile federal administration, **we are seeking a \$650,000 allocation**

from the City Council's Immigrant Healthcare Initiative in CFY 2026. This request includes the \$435,504 allocated in CFY 2025, plus an enhancement to support the increase in need from the previous fiscal year.

Enhancing Access to Healthcare for Immigrant New Yorkers

More than three million immigrants live in New York City. They helped weave the fabric of the City's history and are critical to its future. Yet these communities face unjust and unlawful barriers to living, working, going to school, and accessing healthcare. Entrenched barriers based on immigration status leave tens of thousands without access to routine medical care across the city. Access to essential healthcare often results in cost savings for the City, the State, and our safety net health care system when people are able to resume work and productive lives.

The City Councils' IHI funding will support our work to improve access to healthcare for immigrant New Yorkers through direct community connections, training, and legal interventions. We will continue to address the needs of the recently arrived migrants, many of whom need urgent connections to healthcare to manage chronic and acute medical conditions. When it comes to immigrant New Yorkers who are detained in immigration jails, we are one of few organizations positioned to provide medical advocacy and generate awareness of the health hazards of immigration detention. In addition, continued attacks on the asylum process increase the need for culturally competent legal representation. We have specific expertise in representing asylum seekers who identify as transgender, gender-nonconforming and those living with HIV. We will build on our successes in the Immigrant Health Initiative and our expertise to continue to support those in need.

Representing Immigrant New Yorkers from Vulnerable Communities – including those who are disabled, medically vulnerable or identify as transgender, gender-nonconforming or living with HIV

As an organization with expertise in representing chronically ill or disabled noncitizens, we have received numerous requests for representation on behalf of these vulnerable individuals. Many of these individuals received *pro se* assistance from the city to file asylum applications and are now coming up on their hearing dates in courts without representation. Under draconian and unlawful immigration policy changes, these individuals are now at heightened risk of re-detention and deportation. Enhanced IHI support will allow us to represent and advocate for these vulnerable New Yorkers.

With the support of IHI funding, NYLPI's UndocuCare TGNCI+ program strives to ensure that immigrant New Yorkers who are transgender, gender-nonconforming, intersex (TGNCI), or living with HIV can obtain and sustain access to gender-affirming healthcare, HIV care, and housing through immigration legal advocacy. In the last fiscal year, the TGNCI+ project served 40 trans, gender non-conforming, intersex, or HIV-positive immigrant New Yorkers in their defensive asylum proceedings or affirmative applications to prevent their deportation. We have strong track record securing asylum for these clients, including 1 client who won asylum in 2024 and 2 clients who received visas as trafficking survivors. Furthermore, NYLPI staff supported these clients in their goals of sustaining access to vital gender-affirming healthcare.

For example, in April 2024, we won asylum for a transgender woman from El Salvador who faced extreme harassment and violence in her home country and on her journey to safety in the U.S. The case was so well prepared that the immigration judge granted asylum on the papers, sparing our client the difficulty of reliving her trauma through testimony. In addition, we supported this client to receive a legal name change and obtain stable supportive housing. She is able to continue her healing journey in safety with work authorization and reliable resources. We are eager to continue this critical work with the Council's support and continue to respond to increasing threats from the federal administration to gender affirming healthcare and the rights of people of transgender experience.

Know Your Rights Trainings & Guidance to Healthcare Settings and Directly Impacted Communities

As one of the few organizations operating at the intersection of health and immigrant justice, NYLPI has been responding to an unprecedented demand from medical providers on how to ensure their facilities remain safe for immigrant patients now that the Trump administration rescinded the sensitive locations memorandum which historically limited ICE enforcement at healthcare settings. Doctors and healthcare workers are now overwhelmed and panicked about how to serve their immigrant patients. Conflicting and inconsistent guidance from the City to hospitals has added to the uncertainty.¹ Community members are foregoing vital services out of fear that they will be detained or deported. An immigrant mother in the Bronx who had been undergoing a workup for what is likely brain cancer, missed an appointment she waited for for five months because she was too afraid to leave her home due to the presence of ICE in the community. A medically vulnerable client was assaulted and robbed but refused medical attention out of fear of immigration enforcement. NYLPI has heard from pediatricians that fewer immigrant parents are bringing their children – including U.S. citizens and Lawful Permanent Residents – in for routine checkups. Other pediatricians have been asked by their patients to adopt or care for their children if they are deported.

To meet and respond to these needs, our program has rapidly scaled up our capacity to provide Know Your Rights trainings and guidance. We have presented to doctors, healthcare professionals and medical students on creating safe medical spaces for immigrant New Yorkers. We have delivered in-person and virtual Know Your Rights trainings to directly impacted communities, including understanding rights in the face of an ICE encounter. We are creating additional presentations and guidance tailored for healthcare settings. This vital rapid response work comes in addition to all of our existing programming, advocacy and direct immigration representation.

Preventing the Detention of Immigrant New Yorkers in Conditions Hazardous to Health

NYLPI has for years documented the egregious conditions within ICE detention centers where many New York City residents have suffered medical neglect and lack of disability

¹ See Caroline Lewis, "NYC hospitals scramble to send a clear message to patients, staff amid ICE threats," Gothamist, Feb. 6, 2025, available at: <https://gothamist.com/news/nyc-hospitals-scramble-to-send-a-clear-message-to-patients-staff-amid-ice-threats>.

accommodations causing severe health consequences and other dignitary harms. Far from keeping us safe, immigration enforcement has disastrous impacts on the health and well-being of New York City families and communities.

We track these violations through our Medical Provider Network (MPN), whereby volunteer doctors review medical records of individuals detained by ICE to assess the adequacy of their healthcare and the health risks they face. We receive the majority of referrals from attorneys and social workers with the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (“NYIFUP”) and are able to complement their highly skilled representation with needed medical advocacy and expertise. **The demand for this service is only growing.**

ICE detention in New York State is inhumane. Many New Yorkers enter detention with medical issues that require regular treatment, including medical problems exacerbated by health disparities affecting immigrant communities. People report that the medication they were taking when they entered detention, often for years to decades, is discontinued or altered once they are detained. Even with clear directions regarding prescription medication and its importance, ICE and jails refuse to continue proven treatment, often with negative health consequences. Other deficiencies in medical care include deficient medical records, language access barriers, lengthy delays in receiving medical treatment, inadequate treatment for acute pain and failure to evaluate and manage chronic illnesses and mental health problems.² For seriously ill people cut off from their continuing care in the community due to detention, interrupted treatment can have severe consequences, up to and including death.³

Many people arrested by ICE in New York City are detained at Orange County Jail (OCJ) in Goshen, NY. OCJ is notoriously dangerous and abusive. In previous hearings before this council, directly impacted New Yorkers testified about the conditions in the jail. People reported unsanitary conditions, exceedingly cold temperatures, inedible and inadequate food. Testimony and legal claims have also highlighted that officers at OCJ are abusive: they make xenophobic and racist comments, including using the N word; scream at detainees for not speaking in English; threaten to put detainees in solitary confinement for wearing a sweater in freezing temperatures; and regularly fail to provide appropriate meals and prayer spaces. There are widespread reports of physical violence and excessive force by OCJ officers, including pepper spraying, kicking, and punching people involved in nonviolent protest.

Through our MPN, NYLPI has conducted significant medical advocacy on behalf of individuals detained at OCJ and collected data of persistent medical neglect by ICE. In particular, we have documented four categories of care gaps: (1) neglect of follow-up care, (2) lack of ongoing care for chronic conditions, (3) lack of medication access, and (4) improper management of medical conditions.

² See New York Lawyers for the Public Interest, *Still Detained and Denied: The Health Crisis in Immigration Detention Continues*, April 2020, available at: <https://www.nylpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/NYLPI-report-detainment.pdf>.

³ See American Civil Liberties Union, Physician for Human Rights & American Oversight, *Deadly Failures: Preventable Deaths in U.S. Immigration Detention*, June 21, 2024, available at: <https://www.aclu.org/publications/deadly-failures-preventable-deaths-in-us-immigrant-detention>.

For example, appropriate follow-up care is a cornerstone of medical practice. After a medical event, such as an illness or injury, it is imperative that patients receive continuing care and counseling to determine the cause of the event and prevent future instances. However, ICE has been evidenced to neglect adequate follow-up care for the people in its custody in various aspects. This lack of follow-up can lead to significant consequences, up to and including death.

One case, “Mr. J,” exemplifies the stark failure of ICE to provide proper follow-up care. Unfortunately, Mr. J had multiple instances of inadequate or absent follow-up care that likely led to deterioration of his health. Mr. J’s health problems centered around a stroke he had prior to his time in detention. His stroke history at a relatively young age raised concerns for multiple underlying problems. While he was incarcerated, Mr. J experienced symptoms concerning for another stroke. However, he was not evaluated until weeks later when he was finally brought to the hospital. In a patient like this with a stroke history, particularly of unknown cause, any symptoms concerning for stroke should have been addressed immediately. If his symptoms had been caused by a stroke, lack of proper care could have caused him severe lifelong disability, or even death.

As a deportation defense attorney for many years, I know that immigration enforcement affects not only recently arrived New Yorkers, but also long-time NYC residents with extensive family and community ties. When a noncitizen New Yorker is arrested and detained by ICE, they lose access to the healthcare they received in their communities. At the same time, their children and other family members of those detained frequently experience worsening physical and psychological health outcomes with the removal of their primary caretakers or providers. These concerns take on increased urgency with the recent announcement from ICE that they will reopen the detention facility Delaney Hall in Newark, New Jersey, after awarding the private prison company GEO Group a 15-year, \$1 billion contract.⁴ Before neighboring Hudson and Bergen counties ended their ICE contracts, the majority of all New York City residents picked up by ICE were detained there. With 1,000 beds, the reopening of Delaney Hall is a threat to the health and safety of immigrant communities in New York.

Worsening health outcomes – including preventable deaths due to inadequate medical care – are *not* exceptional occurrences in ICE detention. They are the norm. The Council must act swiftly to protect New Yorkers and their families from this harm.

Nonprofit Rapid Response Network

The new federal administration is focusing tremendous power on mass deportations, revocation of racial justice initiatives, claw backs of climate and environmental justice funding, and retribution against those who stand up to it. The human cost to New York’s disadvantaged communities will be staggering. Nonprofits and CBOs serving or employing immigrants and

⁴ “ICE reopening immigration detention center in Newark, New Jersey this spring,” Eyewitness News, Feb. 27, 2025, available at: <https://abc7ny.com/post/ice-reopening-immigration-detention-center-newark-new-jersey-spring/15960113/>.

other marginalized groups will form a critical shield but are also becoming direct targets of federal agencies attempting to conduct raids, chill advocacy, and cut services to people in need.⁵

With support from a Speaker's request and Protect NYC Families, the Nonprofit Rapid Response Network will strengthen and protect New York City's nonprofit sector by providing informational resources, relationship-building, practical training, and legal advice and representation to nonprofits and CBOs. It will foster collaboration, build capacity, and distribute essential resources and legal advice to help nonprofits survive attacks by the federal administration.

Conclusion

Thank you, Chairperson Avilés and the Committee, for giving us the opportunity to present testimony today and for this tremendous assistance, and we ask that the funding continue in FY 2026 for both NYLPI and our partners. We look forward to continuing our work to improve immigrant New Yorkers' access to healthcare for new arrivals and long-time New Yorkers alike. **Health is a human right.**

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For almost 50 years, NYLPI has fought to protect civil rights and achieve lived equality for communities in need. Led by community priorities, we pursue health, immigrant, disability, and environmental justice. NYLPI combines the power of law, organizing, and the private bar to make lasting change where it's needed most.

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

For more information visit: www.nylpi.org

⁵ NYLPI recently published guidance for nonprofits responding to the threat of immigration enforcement. See New York Lawyers for the Public Interest and Lawyers Alliance for New York (Dec. 23, 2024), available at: <https://www.nylpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Guidance-to-Nonprofits-Regarding-Immigration-Enforcement.pdf>.

**Testimony to New York City Council Criminal Justice Committee
Executive Budget FY25**

Public Hearing

May 27, 2025

Tanya Krupat
Vice President, Policy & Advocacy
Osborne Center for Justice Across Generations



Osborne
ASSOCIATION

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to the Criminal Justice Committee regarding the FY 2026 Budget. My name is Tanya Krupat and I am the Vice President of Policy and Advocacy at the Osborne Center for Justice Across Generations. As many of you know, Osborne Association is one of the oldest and largest criminal justice service organizations in the state. Our services reach over 14,000 individuals each year, assisting them and their families in navigating arrest, courts, incarceration on Rikers and in state prisons, and reentry. Through advocacy, direct service, and policy reform, Osborne works to create opportunities for people to heal, grow, be accountable, and thrive. Osborne also now provides a variety of reentry housing, including transitional housing at the Fulton Community Reentry Center in the South Bronx and permanent supportive housing at Marcus Garvey Apartments in Brownsville, Brooklyn. Fulton, a former prison that we opened last April, houses 140 men returning from DOCCS, and Marcus Garvey provides apartments for older adults returning from long-term incarceration.

Osborne has been a proud member of the NYC ATI/Reentry Coalition since its inception and we are among the 12 organizations included in the funding request for an increased investment of \$2.4 million, a \$200,000 increase for each of our 12 organizations. As a coalition, we are critical to the closure of Rikers, as documented in the recently published [report](#), *Expanding Alternatives to Incarceration in NYC: A Pathway to Safely Closing Rikers Island*. Since our approach is to identify and address underlying issues and root causes, to see everyone's humanity, and to address harm without causing more harm, we produce true, lasting public safety outcomes.

The City Council's critical funding for ATIs and reentry services allows our organizations to continue providing services across the full spectrum of the criminal legal system. We remain grateful for the flexibility ATI funding provides to our organizations as we work to decarcerate our jails and prisons with a particular focus on reducing the population on Rikers Island and moving towards its closure. It bears repeating as often as possible how effective and affordable ATI programs are. For the cost of detaining one person on Rikers for one year (around \$507,000) – a year in which they are separated from their family, are likely to experience or witness violence, may lose their job and home, and experience deteriorating health and mental health – ATIs can serve more than 30 people, and yield positive and life-changing results that make us all safer.

We were thrilled that the funding for ATI and reentry services was baselined at current levels in the Executive Budget the Mayor released earlier this month. Yet, this funding allows us to collectively only meet a fraction of the need. We urge the City to expand investment in these critical and cost-effective services.¹

As you negotiate this year's budget, we support the recommendations of the Freedom Agenda and urge you to:

¹ To add to the argument that more police and correction officers do not make us safer, consider that NYC paid out more than \$205 million last year alone in police and prosecutorial misconduct legal settlements for 953 cases. Since 2018, the City has paid out over \$750 million in legal settlements related to police misconduct lawsuits. This comes out of our tax dollars. The City should be investing in what works and increasing this investment, not investing in bloated spending and greater harm.

- Building on the City Council's investment last year, the administration must **appropriate \$26.6 million in annual funding² for [Justice Involved Supportive Housing](#)**, and reissue the RFP for 380 new units with funding levels that support an enhanced level of services. This will enable the City to deliver on the Close Rikers Points of Agreement to expand JISH to 500 units.
- **Allocate \$24.7M more to create 15 more [Intensive Mobile Treatment](#) (IMT) teams, and pilot step-down teams.** The waitlist to access this evidence-based program is over 400 people. Resources are needed for both full-service teams, and to pilot a step-down version. The Executive Budget allocates \$5.3M for IMT, but far more is needed to eliminate the waitlist.
- **Allocate \$7M more to create more [Forensic Assertive Community Treatment](#) (FACT) teams**, and to pilot ACT step-down teams in order to cut the long wait times (average of 6 to 12 months) to access this service.
- **Allocate \$6M more to open four new crisis respite centers**, in compliance with Local Law 118-2023.
- **Allocate \$6.3M to open 250 more residential treatment beds** for people with serious mental illness and with co-occurring addictions
- **Increase the Board of Correction budget to at least 1% of DOC's budget.³** While the Executive Budget restores proposed cuts to BOC's budget, their capacity still falls far short of what's needed to provide sufficient oversight for the City's jails. Establishing a minimum budget would increase BOC's headcount from about 33 currently to approximately 100, but would add only \$8.1M to the overall expense budget.⁴
- **Eliminate vacancies for DOC uniformed staff.**
The Department of Correction is budgeted for 7,060 uniformed officers, but as of January 1, 2025 they employed [5,908 and 1,152 positions were vacant](#).⁵ OMB has not made a plan to realign staffing in proportion with reducing the number of people in jail and closing Rikers. By eliminating uniformed vacancies (which have been growing since 2022), DOC could realize cost **savings of \$149.6M annually.**⁶

In the case of Rikers programming, we remain deeply concerned that the five-hour daily programming requirement under local law⁷ is not being met. We urge the City Council and the Board of Correction to examine compliance with this mandate. When the 5 Targeted Approach Providers (TAP) were providing programming (Osborne being one of the providers), we were required to complete a daily dashboard to track the provision of programming across all housing units. Is DOC completing this? What constitutes programming? What curricula and approaches have DOC staff been trained to facilitate? How many people are participating? If people in custody are refusing to participate in programming (as DOC testified this morning), what are the reasons for refusal?

² This amounts to \$12.2M in increased annual funding, in addition to the \$14.4M available through the 2019 RFP.

³ Other oversight agencies like CCRB and IBO have minimum budgets linked to the size of the agency they oversee. [Further outlined here.](#)

⁴ The FY2026 Executive Budget allocated \$4M to BOC. One percent of DOC's \$1.2B budget would give BOC a budget of approximately \$12M.

⁵ Per Independent Budget Office

⁶ Based on \$129,897 per officer, as [calculated by the Vera Institute.](#)

⁷ NYC Code, Title 9, Chapter 1, Section 110, [Education and Programming.](#)

We urge the City Council to push the City to restore funding for programs on Rikers. While we are grateful for the \$14 million investment from DOC for trauma-informed and educational programming, and substance abuse treatment, this is not a restoration of the \$17 million for programming. This programming - which has been absent for 2 years now - supported transformation, healing, skills-building, reflection, and connections that were transferable into the community and increased the likelihood of success upon release.

To strengthen New York City's families and communities, and contribute to public safety and a brighter City, Osborne has submitted the following requests for FY26 City Council funding:

Court Advocacy and Mitigation Services (CAS), funded in large part by City Council ATI funding, continues to demonstrate how effective court mitigation services are in human and economic terms.

- In Fiscal Year 2024, CAS's programs:
 - **Enrolled 796** people
 - Assisted **98%** of those served with **court-imposed conditions** in meeting all conditions
 - Achieved a **93% successful disposition** rate
 - Prevented **1,411 years of incarceration** at a cost savings to the City and State of more than \$162 million
- Since regaining funding in July 2023, the **Second Look** program at Rose M. Singer Center has secured the release of **16** women or transgender people (one-third of the clients enrolled into programming during this same period) who are detained in DOC custody, which yields a cost savings of more than \$8 million.

Safeguarding Children

For the past 4 years, the City Council has funded Osborne to work with the NYPD to **Safeguard Children at the Time of Their Parent's Arrest**. The funding allowed us to assist NYPD in complying with the recently passed Local Law 1349-A, enacted to reduce trauma to children when NYPD arrests the parent or caregiver of a child. Attached to my testimony is a **letter of support from NYPD Commissioner Tisch** urging the Council to continue this funding, which allows us to train and work with the NYPD to safeguard children.

Our role has been to assist in developing and delivering training, provide technical assistance to the NYPD regarding data collection, and build a network of community-based providers who can offer post-arrest support to children and families. While we have trained more than 5,000 recruits and newly promoted Sergeants and Lieutenants, as well as Youth Coordinating Officers, there remains much more to do, and much that is currently in progress.

In FY26, with continued funding, we can train Training Sergeants and thousands of recruits, create practice tools for Officers to access on their phones via NYPD's intranet, equip scenario-based training rooms with props to indicate the presence of children, include information about interacting with children in roll call, and reach many more of the 30,000

members of service. We can also work to create sustainable training plans and ensure this work continues and is embedded in NYPD policy and practice. As mentioned, the funding we received from the City Council also allowed us to begin building a consortium of service providers that can address the needs of children and families after a parent's arrest. Sustained funding would allow this work to continue; without a dedicated focus on this vital component and funding for it, these efforts would end. FY26 funding would also allow us to pursue aspects of this work that are critically important but we have not yet addressed: safeguarding children present when warrants are executed through pre-arrest planning, and confronting the ongoing lack of data. We are requesting \$300,000 to continue this work, and to expand it to the NYC Department of Correction to improve interactions with children visiting NYC jails and improve the existing protocol when visitors with children are arrested (a fairly frequent occurrence, according to DOC).

Bronx Osborne Gun Accountability and Prevention (BOGAP) Program

In February, Osborne submitted a discretionary funding request for \$20,000 to cover specific program components for our Bronx Osborne Gun Accountability and Prevention (BOGAP) Program. On April 22, we learned our federal funding was immediately terminated by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) resulting in a sudden loss of \$666,000 and more than half of BOGAP's annual operating budget. This has created a dire situation as we scramble to save this incredibly effective program.

Launched in 2021 in partnership with the Bronx District Attorney's Office, BOGAP is the first initiative of its kind in New York City. It offers young people ages 16–30 facing first-time gun possession charges a yearlong alternative to incarceration. Rather than simply punishing behavior, BOGAP addresses its root causes—trauma, systemic disinvestment, and lack of opportunity—through trauma-informed treatment, cognitive behavioral therapy, credible messenger mentorship, and career training.

It costs about \$110,000 per year for one person incarcerated in a NY State prison, and about \$507,000 per year per person detained on Rikers. BOGAP successfully keeps young people out of jail and prison, saving millions of dollars and achieving positive outcomes and brighter futures for young adults, as demonstrated by our extraordinarily high retention rate (98%) and described last year in [this feature article by the Bureau of Justice Assistance](#). BOGAP not only reduces recidivism, but actively promotes public safety and equity in communities most impacted by gun violence.

- In 2024:
 - **65** BOGAP participants were served
 - **24** out of **29** exits were successful, or an **83% success rate**, preventing **84 years** of incarceration (saving millions of dollars)
 - Of participants enrolled who were eligible to reach their **3-month-retention** rate, 23 out of 24 participants, or **96%** did so
 - Staff **facilitated 824 unique group sessions**

To date, in May 2025, we have 43 young people currently enrolled and more awaiting entry. The abrupt funding cut by BJA threatens to dismantle the very supports that are helping young people see a brighter future for themselves and change their lives—and our communities—for the better. We urgently need City Council's support to ensure continuity of care and preserve the full impact of this program, which serves 75 participants annually.

We respectfully request your leadership in advocating for City funding to fill this unexpected shortfall. Your support will help preserve a nationally recognized, evidence-based program at a critical time in our shared mission to prevent violence, promote healing, and create real alternatives to incarceration.

Improving the Health & Well-Being of NYC's Youth

The impact of a parent's or family member's arrest and incarceration on young people is often overlooked yet is a very common and significant experience: one in 14 children have experienced the incarceration of a parent. Racial disparities in the criminal legal system transfer to children as well: one in four Black children, one in 10 Latino/a children, and one in 25 white children experience parental incarceration.⁸ We seek renewed funding for our Improving Behavioral Health and Well-being of NYC's Youth services, which assess and address mental health and trauma in youth impacted by the criminal legal system. We are requesting \$158,000 (funded through the Court-involved Youth Mental Health Initiative) to assess and connect young people with treatment options that alleviate stress, improve functioning, and reduce trauma symptoms. Specific deliverables include conducting 60 assessments, and connecting youth via at least 120 referrals.

- With support from the **Court-Involved Youth Mental Health Initiative** in FY24, 84 young people were assessed for mental health needs, and Osborne made **165 internal and external referrals** for services.
- In Calendar Year 2024, Osborne's programs engaged **129 children of incarcerated parents** and **8 grandchildren** of incarcerated grandparents.

Reentry Housing

The housing crisis in the City remains significant and those reentering the community from jail and prison encounter not only the shortage of affordable housing, but also housing discrimination due to their conviction histories, which we hope will be mitigated with the passage of the Fair Chance for Housing Act. Thank you to the City Council for passing this landmark bill in December 2023, which went into effect in January of this year!

⁸ Turney & Goodsell (2018); The Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center reports that in fiscal year 2019-2020; Children of the Prison Boom: Mass Incarceration and the Future of American Inequality. Wakefield & Wildeman (2009).

According to the *State of the Homeless 2024*⁹ report, as of July 2023, 41.8 percent of those leaving NYS prisons went directly to the NYC shelter system. To address the dire need for reentry housing, Osborne opened the **Fulton Community Reentry Center** last year, where we are providing transitional housing beds for 140 older men returning from prison and an array of reentry services in the former state-owned Fulton Correctional Facility. We are grateful for past Council funding for Fulton, and this year we are requesting funding for our innovative Kinship Reentry Housing program in the amount of \$250,000.

Osborne launched the **Kinship Reentry Housing Program** (Kinship) in 2021 in response to the desperate need for reentry housing and a support system for families housing their returning loved ones. Inspired by the kinship foster care model, Kinship's services for families include:

- \$500 monthly cash assistance payments for up to 12 months to offset the economic impact of housing a formerly incarcerated family member;
- Case management and counseling to support families in the reunification process, delivered by credible messenger staff who draw from their own experiences with welcoming a loved one home;
- Home visits and advocacy for families, including addressing unsafe living conditions with landlords;
- Financial literacy education and financial planning for the end of the 12-month cash assistance program; and
- Service coordination with the formerly incarcerated person's reentry services provider.

The maximum \$6,000 cash assistance distributions (which do not affect an individual's benefits) provided to Kinship families per year are significantly less than the costs associated with housing a person in a city shelter: \$50,370 annually.¹⁰ The annual cost of serving a Kinship family is approximately \$12,000, resulting in shelter diversion savings of \$38,370 for every family served.

To date, we have served 256 NYC families and the initial results are highly promising:

- A 83% successful exit rate (meaning that the loved one continued living with their family for 12 months, and the family completed 12 months of supportive services);
- 90% reported that their family relationships were "better" at time of program exit than when they started the program;
- 94% reported their family's financial stability was "better" at time of program exit than when they started the program;
- Only two individuals hosted by their families have been reincarcerated (both due to parole revocation rather than new criminal convictions)

⁹<https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/state-of-the-homeless-2024/#closing-the-prison-to-shelter-pipeline>

¹⁰ NYC Independent Budget Office (2022). *Focus On: The Preliminary Budget, Adams Increases Funds for Homeless Shelters, But More Needed for Shelters and Other Programs*. Retrieved from <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/adams-increases-funds-for-homeless-shelters-but-more-needed-for-shelters-and-other-programs-fopb-march-2022.pdf>

- No one involved in the program has become homeless.

With support from the City Council, Osborne will be able to sustain this innovative cost-effective program, and strengthen clinical support offered to families, including a focus on supporting older caregivers.

Elder Reentry

Currently, over 1,000 people in NYC DOC custody are aged 50 and older, including people in their 80s. This number has risen significantly in the past year. Moreover, older people in jail are likely to have experienced repeated incarceration, often for acts related to mental illness or substance use disorder (SUD), which affect more than half of people on Rikers Island. Further, the numbers of aging people in prisons across New York State have climbed steadily over decades even as the overall prison population has fallen, due to harsh sentencing laws and repeated parole denials¹¹.

Osborne's Elder Reentry Initiative (ERI) provides cognitive-behavioral interventions and transitional planning services to older adults in DOC custody, as well as reentry support for older people returning from incarceration. On Rikers, ERI staff travel through all 8 jails and prioritize housing areas with the greatest concentration of older, high-risk individuals. ERI staff will assist SLE with participant referrals and linkages to community resources. Funded by the Council in the past, we request continued funding in the amount of \$125,000 to support two related program areas: (1) The Elder Reentry Initiative's participant screening, intake and assessment, reentry service plans, community case management, and technical assistance; and (2) Osborne's advocacy and public education on behalf of older adults.

- On **Rikers Island**, a DCJS-funded program centered on a cognitive behavioral intervention curriculum, Interactive Journaling, supplements the City council funding for elder detainees. The curriculum is delivered in both in-person group sessions and one-on-one sessions via video conference.
- ERI facilitators also discuss with participants their plans for discharge from custody and complete a basic discharge plan. Follow-up for those released to the community is performed by Osborne's Community Reentry Justice Network staff.
- **94** individual participants were served by the program on Rikers Island in CY24.
- Last year, **293** individual CBI sessions were delivered to elders on Rikers Island.

Funding for Osborne's ERI program addresses a critical need to support older people as they come home from lengthy incarceration and make the very challenging adjustment into a fast-paced, digital world, as well as those on and returning from Rikers. Not only does this benefit public safety, but it also benefits us all as older people have much to contribute and teach us.

¹¹ https://www.osborneny.org/assets/files/Osborne_HighCostsofLowRisk.pdf;
<https://www.vera.org/news/new-yorks-parole-system-is-broken>;
https://fortunesociety.org/media_center/opinion-addressing-the-plight-of-new-yorkers-aging-behind-bars/

Health & LGBTQIA+ Reentry Services

We have submitted a renewed funding request for \$110,000 to support formerly incarcerated people who are living with or at high risk of contracting HIV and come from low-income communities of color, with a focus on LGBTQIA+ people. Osborne will provide sexual health education, referrals to prevention and treatment services, trauma support, and other supportive services. In FY24, this program's staff:

- participated in **20 outreach events** (both virtually and in person) in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Queens, **averaging about 51 attendees** per outreach event and distributing over **400 educational pamphlets**.
- facilitated **59** educational sessions, with an estimated 153 participants served through the groups.

Please see our full list of seven (7) funding requests in the attached document.

In closing, we urge the City Council to invest in community-based solutions with a demonstrated track record of achieving positive outcomes that drive public safety. With a robust ecosystem of ATI and reentry providers standing ready to expand and serve more people, we need an “all hands on deck” approach to decarceration, including greater investment in ATDs and ATIs, expanding treatment and mental health services, improving court processing times and court production, funding Second Look efforts, and expanding an array of affordable and reentry housing options.

And in the midst of all of this, we thank the Council for standing strong against allowing ICE onto Rikers and not reopening the shuttered ICE facility on the island.

It will take all of us working together along with critical investments to support and strengthen communities, ensure fewer people are arrested, and to finally close Rikers.

Thank you.

The Osborne Association

New York City Council Discretionary Funding Requests FY26

Program	Description	FY26 Request	FY25 Funding
Alternatives to Incarceration and Reentry Services (Ref. 194457)	Osborne’s portion of the ATI coalition request, which will support multiple programs: (1) court advocacy and mitigation services; (2) video visiting and family strengthening activities; (3) expansion of job training and placement; (4) elder reentry services; and (5) the Osborne Center for Justice Across Generations. (Application PDF)	\$2,052,074	\$1,852,074
Bronx-Osborne Gun Accountability and Prevention Program - BOGAP (Ref: 193844)	To support BOGAP—an innovative diversion program developed with the Bronx DA—to serve approximately 75 participants annually. Funds will be used to provide hot meals to program participants, stipends for internships, and additional support services to participants to increase their chances of success in the program. (PDF)	\$20,000	\$20,000
Elder Reentry Initiative Services and Advocacy (Ref: 194063)	To support two related program areas: (1) The Elder Reentry Initiative’s participant screening, intake and assessment, reentry service plans, community case management, and technical assistance; and (2) Osborne’s advocacy and public education on behalf of older adults. (PDF)	\$125,000	\$90,000

Health and Wellness – Ending the Epidemic (Ref. 193984)	To support formerly incarcerated people who are living with or at high risk of contracting HIV and come from low-income communities of color, with a focus on LGBTQIA+ people. Osborne will provide sexual health education, referrals to prevention and treatment, trauma support, and other supportive services. (PDF)	\$110,000	\$104,325
Safeguarding Children Initiative (Ref: 193568)	To support the work of Local Law 1349-A, enacted to reduce trauma to children when NYPD arrests their parents. Osborne will provide necessary training and administrative support to the NYPD, and build a network of CBOs that can provide post-arrest support to children. (PDF)	\$300,000	\$265,000
Improving Behavioral Health and Wellbeing for Youth (Ref: 194209)	For assessing and addressing mental health and trauma in youth impacted by the criminal legal system through treatment options that alleviate stress, improve functioning, and reduce trauma symptoms. Targets: 60 assessments; 120 referrals. (PDF)	\$158,000	\$158,000
Kinship Reentry Housing Initiative (Ref. 194304)	To sustain and expand the <i>Kinship Reentry Housing Program</i> , which provides financial assistance, case management, and peer support to families housing a loved one returning from incarceration. By addressing economic and logistical barriers to stable reentry housing, the program reduces reliance on the shelter system, strengthens family reunification, and lowers the risk of recidivism. (PDF)	\$250,000	N/A



**THE POLICE COMMISSIONER
CITY OF NEW YORK**

April 25, 2025

Speaker Adrienne Adams
New York City Council
250 Broadway Ste. 1880
New York, NY 10007

Dear Speaker Adams:

I have been informed that the Osborne Association has applied for continued New York City Council discretionary funding for its work with the New York City Police Department ("NYPD") on implementing practices and developing training regarding the Child-Sensitive Arrest protocol delineated in New York City Administrative Code section 14-181.

This law was enacted in 2020, specifically to reduce the trauma children and families may face when NYPD officers arrest the caregiver of a minor child. Last year, Osborne received City Council funding which allowed it to assist the NYPD with the implementation of this protocol, which requires training and follow-up support. The law specified that the NYPD should include a nonprofit partner to participate in the process, however, no funding was allocated to accomplish this. I understand that the City Council provided funding to Osborne through which Osborne was able to hire a full-time staff. Further, Osborne was able to make additional staff available to NYPD to develop training materials and establish a network of partner referral organizations, as required in the above mentioned law.

We are in the process of working with Osborne to tailor training to a wide variety of personnel, including recruits, police officers and various ranks of supervisors. We welcome Osborne's role in educating uniformed members of the service about the impact of parental arrest, along with practical ideas for implementing policies designed to lessen trauma at, and following, an arrest including providing and connecting children to safe settings when caregivers are taken into custody.

We would request that you give the Osborne Association's funding application all due consideration for inclusion in the Fiscal Year 2026 budget as it supports a significant City interest.

Sincerely,


Jessica Tisch
Police Commissioner

Committee on Immigration Jointly with the Committee on Finance
“Executive Hearings- Immigration”

Testimony from African Communities Together
May 27, 2025

Good afternoon Chair Brannan, Chair Avilés, and members of the Committees on Finance and Immigration. Thank you for holding today’s important hearing.

My name is Airenakhue B. Omoragbon and I am the New York Policy Manager at African Communities Together (ACT). As a national membership organization that is by and for African immigrants, ACT is dedicated to fighting for civil rights, opportunity, and a better life for our communities in the United States. We are headquartered in Harlem and the members of our New York Chapter hail from countries like Senegal, Guinea, Sudan, Mauritania, and the Ivory Coast.

I am here today to ask the City Council to renew \$7.8M in funding to the Language Access Grant to expand vital services, ranging from rapid legal response to critical community education, to help immigrants access resources and protect their rights. I make this request, in hopes that the Council will completely restore funding for AfriLingual, New York’s first and premier African worker-owned language collaborative.

According to New York’s statistics, there are an estimated 172,712 immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa living in New York State. In New York City alone, there are approximately 86,694 speakers of African languages, and tens of thousands of speakers of French and Arabic. Many of these African language speakers are Limited English Proficient (LEP), and studies show that African immigrants are among New York’s most language-isolated communities.

From 2016 to present, African Communities Together has worked to eliminate language and cultural barriers to immigrants’ access to public services. We have worked with organizations like MASA, the Asian-American Federation (AAF), Haitian American United for Progress (HAUP), the Immigrant Advocates Response Collaborative (I-ARC), and the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) to create pipelines to employment for New Yorkers trained in interpretation.

As part of the Language Justice Collaborative, we have also:

- Advocated for New York City’s Local Law 30, mandating the translation of documents into the 10 designated citywide languages; and
- Pushed for the passage of New York State Language Access Law (Chapter 56 of 2022), which codified New York’s language access policy and expanded the statewide languages of translation from 6 to 12, to include languages like French and Arabic.

Last year, we worked with our colleagues to lead a successful campaign that resulted in the New York City Council making an unprecedented investment of \$3.8 Million in building the

language access workforce with the creation of language services worker-owned cooperatives and a language bank in Fiscal Year 2023.

Since receiving that funding, AfriLingual has been able to provide New Yorkers with worker-owned language access services, interpretation, translation, and ESL/English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. The development of this African co-operative has also empowered the economic uplift of African immigrants living in the city.

Despite these historic breakthroughs, New York still has a long way to go when it comes to making our city a fair and just environment where everyone can communicate, access information, and have their needs met, regardless of their ability to speak the English language.

As everyone knows, we are in some scary times as a city: Today, one City Council Member spoke about the increase in ICE activity in their district and another mentioned the concerns they had around immigrants' access to ESL courses following the closure of our city's largest shelters. The last time I came here, I told you about ACT's concerns around the U.S. President's plans to designate English as the country's official and only acknowledged language.

African Communities Together is committed to continuing to play our part in helping immigrant New Yorkers access resources and protect their rights. With your help, we believe that over the next two years AfriLingual will expand from the 10 languages we currently offer to providing interpretation, translation, and ESOL instruction in 20 African languages for people in need of those services in New York City.

Now is not the time to take our foot off the gas, when it comes to fighting for language access.

I would like to thank the City Council for all of the work you have been doing over the last year, for empowering immigrant New Yorkers, and your commitment to prioritizing language access in budget negotiations. We hope that we can continue to collaborate with you on this important issue in FY26 and years to come.

Thank you.

Submitted by:
Airenakhue B. Omoragbon, MSSW, LMSW
NY Policy Manager
African Communities Together

LEGAL SERVICES FOR THE WORKING POOR

City Fiscal Year 2026

City Council Executive Budget Hearing
Committee on Immigration and Committee on Finance

May 27, 2025

Introduction

Thank you Chairs Aviles and Brannan and to the New York City Council at large for the long-standing support of the Legal Services for the Working Poor Coalition. My name is Keriann Pauls and I am the Interim Executive Director at TakeRoot Justice one of the five members of the Legal Services for the Working Poor (LSWP) Coalition that also includes CAMBA Legal Services, Housing Conservation Coordinators, Mobilization for Justice and NMIC. The Coalition was created with support from the City Council 20 years ago to address the civil legal needs of working poor and other low-income New Yorkers whose income is slightly higher than the poorest New Yorkers, thus rendering them ineligible for free civil legal services from many organizations. LSWP's services are critical in allowing working New Yorkers to maintain financial independence and preserving economic stability in communities across New York City. In Fiscal Year 2025, the LSWP initiative was funded at \$3,455,000 from the City Council, with each of the five Coalition members receiving \$455,000. In FY 26, TakeRoot Justice and the

other members of the Legal Services for the Working Poor Coalition are requesting a \$600,000 allocation from the City Council, which includes a full restoration of the \$455,000 allocated in FY 25. A \$600,000 allocation to each of the 5 Coalition partners would support critical legal services and allow providers to deepen their impact in the practice areas of immigration, workers' right, benefits, and economic justice. Additionally, the impacts of cuts and actions on the Federal level significantly threaten the social safety net for working poor New Yorkers. We call on the City Council to make critical investments into legal services in FY 26, including the Legal Services for the Working Poor initiative. Added resources are needed to safeguard against misaligned Federal policy.

We continue to see that working poor New Yorkers, who can barely make ends meet, and thus have no disposable income to pay for an attorney face catastrophic consequences as a result of civil legal problems. Common problems include, not being paid for their work; identity theft; the freezing of a bank account as a result of a collection lawsuit they did not even know about; or being denied public benefits to which they are entitled. The consequence of these legal issues can lead to other problems, including increased risk of eviction or foreclosure. These working New Yorkers can end up spiraling downward to join the ranks of the poor if they do not have access to lawyers to assist them. Our legal services organizations represent these New Yorkers in all five boroughs in consumer, foreclosure, immigration, benefits, employment, and housing matters in state, appellate, and federal courts, and various administrative agencies.

Conclusion

This Council's funding for Legal Services for the Working Poor is the only funding that specifically targets the civil legal needs of working people to ensure continued self-sufficiency for families struggling to survive in New York City. It is *vitally* important that the City Council not

only continue to support this flexible funding stream, but increase its funding so that the legal service organizations are able to meet the needs of their clients by providing a diverse array of civil legal services to working poor New Yorkers. We urge the Council to fully invest in civil legal service initiatives overall and for the Legal Services for the Working Poor allocation in particular. This year, in FY 26, the Legal Services for the Working Poor Coalition is respectfully asking the City Council to enhance the allocation of each of the 5 Coalition partners from \$455,000 to \$600,000. Thank you.

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Headquarters**

150 Court St, 3rd Fl
Brooklyn, NY 11201
T: (718) 643-8000
F: (718) 797-0410

**Atlantic Ave
Community Center**

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Brooklyn, NY 11217
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Queens

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Queens, NY 11101
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Queens 2

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Bronx

966 Morris Park Ave, 2nd Fl
Bronx, NY 10462
T: (718) 643-8000

**AAFSC @ the NYC Family
Justice Centers**

Bronx: (718) 508-1222
Brooklyn: (718) 250-5035
Manhattan: (212) 602-2800
Queens: (718) 575-4500
Staten Island: (718) 697-4300

TESTIMONY OF THE ARAB AMERICAN FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH THE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

May 27, 2025

The Arab American Family Support Center (AAFSC) respectfully submits this testimony to emphasize the urgent need for sustained support for community-based organizations like ours, which play a critical role in serving vulnerable New Yorkers. AAFSC provides culturally and linguistically competent, trauma-informed, multi-generational social services to the growing Arab, Middle Eastern, North African, Muslim, and South Asian (AMENAMSA) communities across NYC. With locations in all five boroughs and services available in over 30 languages, AAFSC provided comprehensive support to more than 20,000 individuals last year.

A few months into the new federal administration, devastating changes are already taking a toll on the communities we serve. As AAFSC continues to navigate these challenges, we are submitting this written testimony to highlight the serious impact of proposed federal decisions on our ability to provide essential services.

Federal Funding for Critical Services Is in Jeopardy

Our federally funded mental health and domestic violence case management programs are facing unprecedented uncertainty. Federal funding cuts—including anticipated reductions to the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW)—threaten essential programs like our domestic violence case management program. With federal funding freezes and uncertainties, AAFSC faces a anticipated shortfall of \$1.1 million. Like many CBOs, AAFSC does not have an endowment or reserve funds to cover these gaps while waiting for federal decisions. If this funding disappears, critical services—including mental health counseling and domestic violence intervention—are at risk.

Simultaneously, we are deeply concerned about proposed cuts to key federal safety net programs. Congress is currently negotiating a budget resolution that could slash hundreds of billions of dollars from Medicaid and SNAP. These programs are lifelines for the low-income immigrant and refugee families we serve, providing access to health care, food security, and basic stability. If enacted, these cuts will have devastating consequences for our community, further marginalizing families already struggling to survive in the face of systemic inequities.

How NYC's Immigrant Communities Are Affected

As it's becoming increasingly challenging to do our work, we are also seeing a drastic increase in need. Recent federal policies have placed immigrant communities in immediate danger---eliminating protections for undocumented individuals, escalating enforcement actions, and limiting access to essential services. These policies disproportionately target the Muslim, Arab, Palestinian, Black, and South Asian communities we serve.

The federal administration's aggressive immigration agenda is becoming alarmingly clear. Quotas now require 75 ICE arrests per field office per day, while targeted deportations have been fast-tracked through the use of the Alien Enemies Act—stripping individuals of due process protections. Temporary Protected Status (TPS) has already been revoked for several countries, including Haiti and Venezuela, with more terminations expected. USCIS has mandated the registration of undocumented individuals, a move that raises serious concerns about surveillance and echoes troubling historical precedents. Additionally, the IRS has entered into an agreement with USCIS to share tax information for the purpose of immigration enforcement. Meanwhile, the mass revocation of student visas is yet another signal that this administration intends to criminalize and marginalize immigrant communities. These actions collectively send a chilling message: our neighbors are being deliberately targeted. We are bracing for widespread enforcement sweeps that will tear families apart, destabilize communities, and drive people further into the shadows—away from the services and protections they need most.

We are already seeing the impact:

- Students are afraid to leave shelters.
- Families are withdrawing from public benefits like food stamps due to fear of data sharing.
- Since inauguration day, we've seen an 80% increase in mental health referrals and a 20% increase in legal service requests.
- We risk losing \$1.1 million in federal funds, potentially forcing the furlough of 14 staff.
- Despite growing need, our ability to support survivors of domestic and gender-based violence with safety planning, housing support, legal aid, and crisis services is at serious risk. We currently support over 4,000 survivors each year.

In response, we have scaled our mental health, legal services, and community outreach efforts, strengthened security at our facilities, implementing double sets of locking doors to screen visitors and ensure that no enforcement action occurs without a judicial warrant. We have also trained our staff to respond appropriately should ICE officers attempt to enter our spaces.

Protecting AAFSC from Federal Harassment

We anticipate that federal agencies will intensify scrutiny of nonprofit organizations like ours, using audits and regulatory hurdles to disrupt services. To prepare, we are actively seeking **pro bono legal support** to review our policies, government contracts, insurance coverage, and regulatory reporting.

This work is unfunded but necessary to ensure that AAFSC remains a resource for thousands of vulnerable families across New York City.

How You Can Help

As a New York City Council Member, you are in a unique position to protect community-based organizations like AAFSC and the communities we serve. We urgently need the City's support to sustain our critical programming—especially our high-risk services, such as domestic violence case management and mental health support—which are essential to meeting the growing needs of immigrant communities and communities of color.

In addition to our full slate of FY 2026 funding requests, we want to underscore the urgent need to increase support for programs that are at risk due to anticipated federal cuts, particularly our federally-funded Anti-Violence Program and our SNAP Enrollment Program.

To that end, we respectfully request:

- **An increase to \$400,000 for our Anti-Violence Program through DOVE funding.** The city has long supported our city-wide domestic violence case management work and this year, we hope you will increase your support as the federal government cuts theirs.
- **An increase to \$150,000 for our SNAP Enrollment Program,** to offset the impact of anticipated federal funding reductions and ensure continued access to food assistance for low-income families.
- **Renewal of \$150,000 for our Mental Health Initiative** – AAPI Community Support, which offers direct, in-language counseling sessions for AAPI community members facing mental health challenges.
- **A first-time investment of \$85,000 for our Immigrant Support Initiative,** a comprehensive program providing legal services, adult education, mental health resources, and other essential supports for immigrant New Yorkers.

Now is the time for bold action. Our communities are scared, our resources are stretched thin, and the challenges ahead are immense. We ask for your partnership in ensuring that New York City stands strong against federal intimidation and continues to be a place of refuge for all.

We are grateful for your leadership and look forward to working together to protect the most vulnerable among us.



To: NYC Council Committees on Immigration, Finance, and Criminal Justice
From: Grace Day, Esq., Staff Attorney, The Door's Legal Services Center, and
Lora Adams, Legal Program Manager, Detained Minors Project at The Door
Date: May 27, 2025
Re: Executive Budget for FY 2026 and the Executive Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2025-2029

The Door is a comprehensive youth development organization that has been supporting young people in New York City since 1972. Each year, we serve nearly 9,000 youth between the ages of 12 and 24, many of whom are immigrants. At The Door, young people can access primary and reproductive health care, mental health services, legal assistance, college preparation, career development, housing supports, arts, sports and recreational activities, and nutritious meals – all for free and in a diverse and caring environment. Serving as Manhattan's designated daytime Runaway and Homeless Youth Drop-In Center, and the Bronx's only 24-7 Drop-In Center, we also provide food, clothing, showers, laundry, and case management for youth who are unhoused or experiencing housing instability.

Through our integrated approach, we provide New York City youth with space to overcome their barriers, maximize their potential, and thrive as they transition into adulthood. We prioritize youth empowerment and engagement and are deeply committed to fostering a safe, equitable, and inclusive environment for both young people and staff.

Our **Legal Services Center**¹ is staffed by over 60 professionals, including attorneys, social workers, and support personnel, and focuses on serving vulnerable young people—many of whom are undocumented, unhoused, and/or LGBTQIA+. Our legal team represents youth in immigration court and helps them pursue humanitarian immigration relief through affirmative applications. In 2024 alone, we handled more than 3,300 immigration matters.

To meet the growing demand in the city, we also operate several free legal clinics, including a weekly drop-in clinic primarily serving recent arrivals who are unhoused or housing insecure. However, the need continues to outpace our resources. Most young people screened through our clinics are eligible for some form of immigration relief, but we lack the capacity to provide full legal representation for each of them. Without legal counsel, it is extremely difficult—if not impossible—for a young person to navigate the immigration system on their own.

Legal Services Under Attack by the Current Federal Administration

On March 21, 2025, The Door was notified of an immediate, near-total termination of services under the Unaccompanied Children Program (UCP), a vital initiative that provides legal support and representation to minors who entered the United States alone. Over 80 organizations across the country rely on this program to represent over 26,000 young people. The Door's UCP contract accounts for \$4.6 million and over 60% of our Legal Services Center's funding. As a result, The Door had to issue layoff notices to nearly 20% of its workforce.

¹ <https://www.door.org/legalservices/>



Unaccompanied children enter the country without a parent or legal guardian. Some made the trip to the United States alone, some traveled with adult strangers, others with an older sibling. Some of the children have children themselves. Our program's clients average 11-15 years old, though our youngest is a baby of six months. Most do not speak English, and all are expected to navigate the immigration legal system to either attain legal status or face deportation by the federal government. Most of these children qualify for asylum or another visa meant for abused or abandoned children, but they must apply and make it through immigration court to access that protection. It may be common knowledge to this committee that there is not a right to an attorney in immigration court if you cannot afford one—what may be less known is that this also applies to children.

Congress mandated that unaccompanied children be an exception to this rule, and funding through the UCP program has allowed us to accompany these children through their legal process and post-release to a safe adult sponsor. This contract allows us to support children in the most vulnerable of situations, often alone in the United States. With this funding, we are able to reach these children and give them the legal representation they deserve. For those that we cannot represent directly, we accompany them to each immigration court hearing as a Friend of Court. We are also able to use The Door's supportive services to give kids a chance to thrive—the emotional support of social workers, advocates who care about their holistic well-being, and physical support for housing, educational, health, and food resources after release from federal detention.

While our team resolved to continue representing the current clients in our care for as long as possible after the contract's termination, all arriving children were cut off from all but the most basic legal services. We were forced to freeze our Friend of Court services.

Five days after the termination, we had our first visit with our former clients at a government shelter in Westchester County. We had been there a week before to inform newly arrived children of their rights and to let them know that we would be there for them throughout this legal journey. That day, we sat them down and let them know that we could not be with them at court next week. They would unfortunately be going alone. We had a mix of reactions—fear, silence, bravado. One boy raised his hand and asked about the right to an attorney we had taught him just last week, looking at his little sister. We assured him he did indeed have that right, but we were not able to be that attorney anymore. We walked the children through the court basics—what a judge looks like, what kinds of questions they might ask, and how they don't have to pretend to know the answers if they don't understand.

On April 1st, a federal court in the Northern District of California issued a temporary restraining order stating that the federal government must restore funding to the UCP contract as the issue is litigated, citing the immediate harm to children caused by the funding loss. For four weeks, we remained unfunded as we watched the federal government stall and refuse to comply with the judge's order. The Door decided to rescind the layoff notices for our Legal Service Center staff while this matter evolved; however, our colleagues in other organizations laid off up to 80% of their staff that month.



On April 30th, a federal court in the Northern District of California issued a preliminary injunction, stating that the federal government must restore funding to the UCP contract as the issue is litigated. After nearly six weeks, we were notified that our UCP contract would be reinstated until September 29, 2025. While this is a hopeful development, the federal government has the ability to appeal this decision and this does not account for the weeks between the contract termination and the reinstatement, a period for which it is still unclear whether we will receive any payment. Further, the future of our Legal Services Center and that of thousands of unaccompanied minors beyond September still hang in the balance as they rely on the uncertain continuation of this crucial funding.

It has become clear that the executive branch will do all in its power to have as few people represented in immigration court as possible, even if it means forcing children to show up to court rooms alone. Of course, young children are unable to understand the complexities of ever-changing immigration law and effectively argue the merits of their cases. They do not know what statuses they may qualify for, what the standards are, what evidence they need to bring to the table, some of them are so young they are unable to speak full sentences.

Children with representation in immigration court are seven times more likely to access immigration relief.² Therefore, as we fight the uphill battle that the next four years will bring, we ask for the support of the City Council. In the face of a federal administration that is committed to targeting and terrorizing immigrant communities, our city can use our resources to defend these communities and protect children. We ask that in response to the administration's attack on unaccompanied children's legal representation, the city stands in the gap and grants \$5,400,000 in emergency funding to legal service providers to mitigate the loss of UCP funding.

As a founding member of the Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort (ICARE) coalition, The Door has been the recipient of discretionary funding through the Unaccompanied Minor Children and Families initiative for over a decade and has graciously been awarded funding through the newer Welcome NYC initiative since it was established. These are critical sources of support that enable us to deliver comprehensive wraparound services to immigrant youth—direct legal representation, Know Your Rights trainings, legal clinics, and brief services to triage and prioritize urgent cases.

However, ICARE has not seen a funding increase in six years. We urge the City Council to fully fund ICARE at the coalition's requested amount of \$6,297,250. Of that total, The Door would receive \$900,000 to continue strengthening our capacity to provide effective, comprehensive, and zealous legal representation to immigrant youth.

Additionally, we call for your support of The Door's expanded request of \$50,000 through the Welcome NYC initiative, and its new request of \$50,000 through the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative. We hope to continue relying on the City Council's support for these vital services.

² <https://vera-institute.files.svdcdn.com/production/downloads/publications/representation-matters.pdf>



This funding has allowed for us to respond rapidly to the changing times and offer protection and safety to immigrant youth in New York City. Funding from the City Council has been transformative, enabling us to directly represent immigrant youth while supporting our broader wraparound services. This support has changed the lives and futures of many vulnerable young people, and we sincerely hope for your continued partnership as we work to serve the youth who depend on us most.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Grace Day, Esq.

Staff Attorney

The Door Legal Services Center

Lora Adams

Legal Program Manager

Detained Minors Project

The Door Legal Services Center

**TESTIMONY OF
THE FORTUNE SOCIETY**

**THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
COMMITTEES ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE
AND FINANCE**

City Hall,
New York, NY

Tuesday, May 27, 2025

SUBJECT: Executive Budget Hearing – Criminal Justice

PURPOSE: To highlight the need for investment in Alternatives to Incarceration, reentry services, and to pass Intro. 1100-2024 and Resolution 371-2024

Submitted by

Ronald F. Day
Senior Vice President

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Thank you Council Committee Chairs Nurse and Brannan, and Members of the Committees on Criminal Justice and Finance for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Ronald F. Day, and I am Senior Vice President of The Fortune Society. I have been with the Fortune Society for over ten years managing various units, including discharge planning and other jail-based services, Employment Services, our Center for Research, Inquiry, and Social Justice, and the David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy. My professional experiences, as well as my personal experience serving one year on Rikers Island and 15 years in state prison, inform my understanding of the critical importance of investing in Alternatives to Incarceration (ATIs), reentry services, and supportive housing to reshape lives and contribute to community safety.

The Fortune Society, with its 57-year legacy, is committed to supporting successful reentry from incarceration and providing alternatives to incarceration. Our mission aims to strengthen the fabric of communities by instilling a belief in the power of individuals to change. Through programs shaped by the experiences of our participants, we help rebuild lives. We also seek to change minds through education and advocacy to foster a fair, humane, and rehabilitative justice system. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, we served over 13,000 individuals across our diverse programs and this year, we are on track to serve over 15,000 people.

Fortune is proud to be a member of the New York City Alternative to Incarceration (ATI) and Reentry Coalition, a twelve-member organization that functions as a true ecosystem to provide comprehensive, holistic, and life-changing supports to our collective participants, who total approximately 30,000 annually. We are grateful to the City Council for standing with us in the face of the cuts to ATI and reentry services set forth in the Administration's preliminary budget. We are also grateful to all parties involved that those nearly \$17 million in cuts have been fully restored and, finally, baselined. Baselining this funding is a clear and long overdue historic acknowledgement of the efficacy and impact of ATI and reentry services. During this time of looming federal budgetary uncertainty, however, we urge the Council to provide additional funding to shore up our proven and critical programs. As history shows us, cuts to social services and safety nets fall hardest on the most vulnerable groups, including the people that we serve, who are disproportionately Black and brown and extremely low income. In addition, as the population on Rikers rises unnecessarily even as the deadline for its long overdue closure draws near, we must invest in the kinds of solutions that keep people out of, or from returning to, our city jails. Therefore, we request that the Council provides the Coalition with \$2.4 million in additional funding through the ATI discretionary fund, or an additional \$200,000

per organization, so that each organization can fill potential gaps in our programs, as well as innovate and enhance our services to be fully responsive to our participants' needs.

The restoration of funding to the Board of Correction (BOC) in the Executive Budget is also encouraging, although the Administration's Executive Budget proposes cutting the small staff from 35 to 33 positions. In addition, even at current funding and staffing levels, BOC is not adequately resourced to provide effective oversight of the thousands of people who are held in and work at the multiple facilities spread across Rikers Island. To ensure BOC can perform its Charter-mandated functions, its budget should be at least 1% of the budget of the Department of Correction (DOC). To reach that current single percentage would require an increase of only \$8.1 million.

We urge this Committee, and the Council as a whole, to pass Resolution 371, calling for passage and signing of the state Reentry Assistance Bill ([S6222/A6990](#); formerly S6643A/A9115). For decades, people leaving prison were provided with only \$40; this amount was recently increased to \$200, in a one-time payment, but drawn from the individual's own account. This bill would instead establish a fund to provide people with \$425 per month for six months to help them stabilize and pose less of a burden to their loved ones, many of whom already struggle to make ends meet. This bill meets a critical need because people are at their most vulnerable in the weeks and months following release from incarceration. They typically lack immediate employment or other means to support themselves, and return to communities – and if they are fortunate, families – that are already impoverished and under-resourced.¹ The Reentry Assistance Bill would provide a small yet impactful measure of relief to individuals and their families.

We also urge the Committee on Criminal Justice to expeditiously pass Intro. 1100, which would expand city-funded supportive housing eligibility to individuals and heads of household who have had justice system involvement in the last 12 months, have a serious mental illness or substance use disorder, and are homeless or at risk of being homeless. These criteria would not exclude time spent in jail and prison. Currently, the largest City-funded supportive housing funding stream, NYC 15/15, effectively excludes far too many people on Rikers, as well as those returning to our city from prison. The eligibility criteria for NYC 15/15 needlessly incorporates the federal definition of “chronic homelessness,” which does not count carceral stays of more

¹ Trujillo, J. (Winter 2023). “Reducing Multigenerational Poverty in New York Through Sentencing Reform.” CUNY Law Review 26:1. Retrieved from <https://academicworks.cuny.edu/clr/vol26/iss1/7/>.

than 90 days towards required time spent homeless.² A report released last year by the NYC Independent Budget Office revealed that average length of stay for people on Rikers increased by 91% between FY14 and FY23, to 105 days.³ New York state prison sentences are by definition at least one year.

People identified by DOC as requiring mental health treatment, who are among those who may be eligible for supportive housing, usually remain on Rikers for twice the overall average length of stay.⁴ Similarly, the number of people who are classified as "unhoused" at jail admission has also increased to 33%.⁵ Furthermore, more than half of the people on Rikers have been diagnosed with a substance use disorder.⁶ Of people returning to NYC from our state prisons, as of July 2023, 42% of them were sent directly into our overburdened shelters.⁷ Yet NYC 15/15-funded housing may be off-limits to all of them. Passing Intro. 1100 is a simple solution.

As always, the Fortune Society stands ready to partner with the City to ensure that the most vulnerable among us have access to the supports and services that help them rebuild their lives, especially during these challenging times. ATI and reentry services enhance our collective safety and well-being, while offering tremendous cost savings. Now is the time to invest more in the kinds of programs and supports that reduce our overreliance on incarceration, which continues to cause worsening and disproportionate harm to our Black and brown families and communities.⁸ Investing in proven strategies not only aligns with fiscal wisdom but is also a moral necessity that fosters economic justice, advances racial equity, and upholds our collective humanity.

² *Definition of Chronic Homelessness*. HUD Exchange. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.hudexchange.info/homelessness-assistance/coc-esg-virtual-binders/coc-esg-homeless-eligibility/definition-of-chronic-homelessness/>.

³ NYC Independent Budget Office. (2024, March). *In Custody: Length of Stay & Population Demographics at NYC Jails, 2014-2023*. Retrieved from <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/in-custody-length-of-stay-and-population-demographics-at-nyc-jails-2014-2023-march-2024.html>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ Rodriguez, J. and M. French-Marcelin. (2025, Jan.). *Expanding Alternatives to Incarceration in NYC: A Pathway to Safely Closing Rikers Island*. Retrieved from [Legal Action Center | Expanding Alternatives to Incarceration in NYC](#) (citations omitted).

⁷ Coalition for the Homeless. (2024, July). *State of the Homeless 2024: Rights Under Attack, Leadership in Retreat*. Retrieved from <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/state-of-the-homeless-2024/#closing-the-prison-to-shelter-pipeline>.

⁸ Blau, R. (2023, March 2). "Racial Gap in City Jails Has Only Gotten Worse, John Jay Study Finds." The City. <https://www.thecity.nyc/2023/03/02/racial-gap-nyc-jails-got-worse/>.



New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026.

Testimony of
The Legal Aid Society's Incarcerated Client Services Unit
In Support of Increased Funding to Support Crisis Hotline Services, On-site Services, and Programming for New Yorkers Held in City Jails.

May 28, 2025

Presented by:

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Introduction

The Legal Aid Society, founded in 1876, is the nation's oldest and largest nonprofit legal services agency, providing comprehensive legal services to low-income individuals and families in all five boroughs of New York City. Legal Aid's mission is to improve the lives of low-income New Yorkers by ensuring that no New Yorker is denied access to justice because of poverty. For over 50 years, Legal Aid has worked to improve confinement conditions and protect the fundamental human rights of incarcerated individuals in New York City jails. To further that work, Legal Aid operates an incarcerated persons crisis hotline and has paralegals on-site at each jail facility to address the needs of incarcerated persons in the City jails. Legal Aid has for years advocated for more robust programming in the City jails to support people while incarcerated. Through this testimony, Legal Aid calls on the City to invest more funding to support crisis hotline services, on-site paralegal services, and social programming for New Yorkers incarcerated in the City jails.

Increase Funding to Support Crisis Hotline Services and On-site Services for New Yorkers in the City Jails

People in carceral settings face significant challenges and trauma while incarcerated, and they require support and services to manage the practical realities of incarceration. While the Department of Correction offers services to incarcerated New Yorkers, Legal Aid supplements those services through its incarcerated persons crisis hotline and our on-site paralegals assigned to each jail facility. Through its crisis hotline, Legal Aid fields calls from incarcerated persons and their families to address their concerns and connect them services, and through their on-site paralegals, Legal Aid meets in person with incarcerated clients and advocates directly with correction officials to ensure clients receive assistance. In fiscal year 2026, Legal Aid is seeking additional funding totaling \$2.7 million to increase our hotline capacity as well as our paralegal staff within the facilities.

Legal Aid's hotline and paralegal staff serves all people in City custody and their families, including those represented by other defense organizations, private counsel, and 18-b attorneys. In fiscal year 2024, Legal Aid served incarcerated New Yorkers across forty-nine of the fifty-one city council districts. Legal Aid's hotline for incarcerated individuals and their families helps people in custody manage issues such as access to medical and mental health care, threats of violence and protection from harm, sexual abuse, discrimination, educational assistance for young, incarcerated people, and oppression and mistreatment of disabled and LGBTQ people in custody. Legal Aid's

case handlers field calls to the crisis hotline and advocate directly with the Department and other agencies to ensure these individuals' needs are met. They also provide accurate and relevant know your rights to incarcerated people and their families. With the information received from the hotline, our staff also identify systemic deficiencies and develop strategic responses to foster solutions to the chronic issues experienced collectively by incarcerated individuals and their families.

Legal Aid also has paralegals posted in every facility who incarcerated people can meet in person and receive real-time assistance. Our paralegals in the City jails are hands on, and they routinely conduct physical wellness checks on persons in custody. The paralegal staff assist people in custody with navigating the DOC bureaucracy with matters like obtaining medical and mental health treatment or the ability to attend the funeral of a family member. Sometimes the paralegals receive calls from people on the hotline with physical ailments, suicidal ideations, or mental health breakdowns. In these cases, the person will be called to the Legal Aid office at the facility and the paralegals will physically walk a person to the health clinic, mental health staff, or if necessary, get DOC staff to escort them.

Legal Aid's paralegals help people with a range of issues like getting in contact with their attorney, sentencing discrepancies, access to programming, law library access, and other issues related to confinement. In the case of sentencing discrepancies, Legal Aid paralegals review the commitment paperwork and, if there is a mistake, which happens sometimes with sentences running consecutively instead of concurrently, the paralegal will reach out to the attorney and even the courts to have the commitment paperwork amended. During fiscal year 2024, Legal Aid paralegals served 1,641 clients and addressed over 2,700 calls received from incarcerated individuals detained at Rikers.

Legal Aid urges the City Council to increase its funding for our jail services to \$2.7 million in fiscal year 2026. This additional funding will enable Legal Aid to expand the volume and efficacy of our services to further advance the dignity and basic needs of incarcerated people.

Thank you for your oversight and your time, and consideration of this testimony.

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

Executive Budget Hearing - Immigration

Presented on May 27, 2025

My name is Deborah Lee, and I am the Attorney-in-Charge of the Immigration Law Unit (ILU) at The Legal Aid Society (LAS). Throughout our nearly 150-year history, LAS has been a tireless advocate for those least able to advocate for themselves. Over 2,300 staff members operate across all five New York City boroughs in our Civil, Criminal Defense, and Juvenile Rights Practices – guided by the fundamental principle that nobody should be denied justice because of poverty. Combining the expertise gained from representing clients across diverse areas of law with the broader public policy perspective of an advocacy group, we lift up marginalized individuals and enable them to advance themselves and their families. Part direct legal services provider, part social justice defenders, we have a unique ability to go beyond individual issues to affect change at a societal level.

Since the 1980s, LAS has maintained a citywide Immigration Law Unit (ILU) within the Civil Practice. ILU, now comprised of over 90 staff, is a recognized leader in the delivery of free, comprehensive, and high-caliber immigration legal services to low-income immigrants in New York City and surrounding counties. Staff represent immigrants before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), before immigration judges in removal proceedings, on appeals to the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), and in federal court on *habeas corpus* petitions and petitions for review. Over the most recent year, ILU assisted in over 8,500 individual legal matters benefiting over 21,100 New Yorkers citywide. In addition to direct legal services, we conduct outreach presentations with community members and grass-roots organizations and provide critical immigration legal information to New Yorkers through our Know Your Rights hub on our website¹ and our dedicated legal helpline telephone bank. We also provide regular trainings to immigrant-serving advocates from community-based organizations, state and local agencies, and judicial and legislative staff. Partnerships with other non-profit organizations and

¹ <https://legalaidnyc.org/news/critical-resources-immigrant-communities/>.

coordination of a successful *pro bono* program with nearly 70 participating law firms enable the ILU to maximize resources to meet the increasing demand for representation.

LAS' testimony here also incorporates our previously submitted testimony from the March 6, 2025 preliminary budget hearing, and is attached here for ease of reference.

We are now 127 days into this presidential administration, and it is clear that our federal government's priority is to detain and deport as many people as it can. Notably, the Trump administration has also been seeking alternative ways to remove non-citizens from this country outside of the traditional Immigration Court system or federal laws governing non-citizens. One notable example is the invocation of the Alien Enemies Act (AEA) to detain and illegally deport Venezuelans to a prison in El Salvador.² Many of the claims of gang affiliation have been found to be unsupported³ but, still, the AEA has become another powerful and dangerous tool for this administration to target non-citizen Venezuelans and remove them from this country.

This federal government is also trying to funnel more non-citizens toward removal orders or otherwise ready them towards expedited removal. In the past month, the Department of Homeland Security began requesting that the Immigration Court recalendar thousands of previously administratively closed cases nationwide, reviving many cases that are over a decade old for active removal proceedings. The intent here is not to give these individuals justice in the Immigration Court system; instead, it is to push this administration's Immigration Court to quickly issue these individuals removal orders, making it easier for these DHS to quickly remove them from this country.

Additionally, ICE is now detaining non-citizens in Immigration Court, for those who are fully complying with immigration laws and trying to have their day in Immigration Court. Instead, in a coordinated effort between the DHS prosecutors and Immigration Court judges, these non-citizens have their court cases quickly dismissed or otherwise canceled, and then ICE officers detain them right outside the courtroom. These dismissals by the Immigration Court are intended to give DHS the sole legal

² See <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/05/16/us/politics/supreme-court-alien-enemies-act-deportations.html>.

³ See <https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-immigration/the-makeup-artist-donald-trump-deported-under-the-alien-enemies-act>; <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/16/us/tattoos-gangs-tren-de-aragua-immigration.html>.

authority over what happens to these non-citizens, subject them to Expedited Removal, a process by which the non-citizen has very limited rights to defend themselves against immediate deportation.⁴ Many of these non-citizen New Yorkers will never have the opportunity to have their asylum claims heard in an unbiased manner, and many will likely be detained and quickly removed back to their home countries.

What can we do to respond to this onslaught of attacks on non-citizen New Yorkers?

LAS calls upon City Council to take bold stands like this its current legal battle to keep ICE out of Rikers. We stand in solidarity with you and will not be complicit in sending more into this federal government's detention and deportation machine.

In addition to continued and additional support, LAS respectfully requests flexibility in our contracts as the immigration legal landscape is shifting tremendously, day by day and week by week. We are eager to do all we can to defend non-citizen New Yorkers but also want our contracts to appreciate that immigration detention may continue to expand and Immigration Court cases require constant but prolonged dedication.

We also ask that City Council prioritize full legal representation in Immigration Court. As we face battles with recalendared Immigration Court cases, asylum cases that both the Immigration Court and DHS are eager to pretermite, we need robust support to help us continue to represent individuals in Immigration Court proceedings for all those LAS represents – the long term permanent resident who is the breadwinner in their family, the parents and children family units who are fleeing persecution in their home countries, the unaccompanied child who needs permanency and safety here, and the hundreds of thousands of others in New York City seeking due process and fair treatment. Immigration Court representation is the most persistent need that non-citizen New Yorkers face and our funding needs to continue to reflect that.

Finally, we respectfully ask that all funding reflects our full staffing needs and costs, as our staff are our front-line responders in these tumultuous times and we must be able to provide for them every year.

⁴ See <https://theintercept.com/2025/05/21/ice-agents-courts-arrests-immigrants-deport/>.

A. Trump 2.0 and Its Already Devastating Impact on New York City

Since January 20, 2025, the current Trump administration has issued over 308 policy actions that impact and harm non-citizens in this country.⁵ Some of the most devastating actions include:

- On January 20, 2025, the Trump Administration sought to deny U.S. citizenship to those born in this country, specifically for two classes of children born after February 19, 2025: (a) a child of an unlawfully-present mother if the father is not a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident (LPR); and (b) a child of a mother with temporary status (e.g., a non-immigrant visa, Temporary Protected Status, etc.) if the father is not a U.S. citizen or LPR.⁶
- On January 20, 2025, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security revoked long-standing guidance protecting certain locations from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) enforcement actions.⁷ ICE is fully encouraged now to conduct arrests and raids in sensitive locations such as churches and religious sites, schools, funeral homes and hospitals. On January 22, 2025, ICE issued further guidance clarifying that it can and will conduct arrests in and near local courthouses, consistent with local laws, including in non-criminal courts.⁸
- On January 21, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security published notice in the Federal Register to fully expand Expedited Removal to any undocumented person who has been present in the United States for less than two years.⁹ If subject to Expedited Removal, that individual would be deprived of the right to present any defense before

⁵ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/?after=2025-01-20>; see also https://www.nycbar.org/reports/the-trump-administrations-early-2025-changes-to-immigration-law/?back=1#_ftn12.

⁶ This Executive Order is currently enjoined pursuant to a Temporary Restraining Order issued in *Washington v Trump*, 2:25-cv-00127 (W.D.Wash.), <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/25502861/tro-on-trump-executive-order-birthright-citizenship.pdf>.

⁷ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/dhs-rescinds-guidelines-for-enforcement-actions-in-or-near-protected-areas/#/tab-policy-overview>.

⁸ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/ice-issues-interim-guidance-for-civil-immigration-enforcement-at-or-near-courthouses/#/tab-policy-documents>.

⁹ See <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/01/24/2025-01720/designating-aliens-for-expedited-removal>.

- an Immigration Judge except in extremely limited circumstances; as a result, these individuals would be summarily detained and deported with no judicial review process.
- On January 23, 2025, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) issued guidance¹⁰ expanding the use of expedited removal for certain non-citizens, including those granted parole into the United States. This internal guidance seemed to indicate that DHS would begin attempting to deny the right to an Immigration Court process to asylum seekers, including those granted humanitarian parole to enter the United States and seek asylum.
 - On January 25, 2025, ICE officials were instructed to comply with a quota of 75 arrests per day in each of its 25 field offices.¹¹ Compared with 2024 ICE arrests nationally, this would result in a six-fold increase in ICE detentions nationwide.
 - On January 29, 2025, the Immigration Court system issued guidance confirming that ICE would be allowed to freely arrest non-citizens attending Immigration Court hearings.¹²
 - On January 29, 2025, the Immigration Court system rescinded its guidance to encourage the use of prosecutorial discretion in Immigration Court and Board of Immigration Appeals cases, which allowed for the dismissal of cases that were not enforcement priorities.¹³
 - On January 29, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security revoked Temporary Protected Status protections for Venezuelan nationals.¹⁴ Currently, those granted TPS based on the 2021 designation will have their TPS status terminated on September 10, 2025, unless DHS acts to terminate it sooner. Those who were granted TPS based on the

¹⁰ See <https://www.dhs.gov/publication/guidance-regarding-how-exercise-enforcement-discretion>.

¹¹ See <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2025/01/26/ice-arrests-raids-trump-quota/>.

¹² See <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/media/1387301/dl?inline>.

¹³ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/eoir-acting-director-rescinds-pm-21-25/#/tab-policy-documents>.

¹⁴ See <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/03/2025-02183/vacatur-of-2025-temporary-protected-status-decision-for-venezuela>.

2023 designation had their status terminated already, effective April 7, 2025.

- On January 29, 2025, President Trump signed into law S.5, also known as the Laken Riley Act, which subjects non-citizens to mandatory detention for a wide range of offenses, including low level theft and shoplifting offenses.¹⁵ This mandatory detention would be triggered not only where someone had been convicted of certain offenses but also when merely accused of them.
- On January 31, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security’s Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued guidance saying that it is not required to consider whether an immigrant has been a victim of a crime when deciding whether to detain them.¹⁶ This is alarming for those who may be in dangerous and vulnerable situations when ICE encounters them, leading to ICE to disregard crimes and maltreatment committed against unaccompanied children.
- On January 31, 2025, the Immigration Court system issued a directive undermining its Office of Legal Access Programs, which provides accreditation for nonprofits that use trained non-attorneys to provide legal assistance to indigent and vulnerable populations.¹⁷
- On February 3, 2025, the Immigration Court system issued guidance allowing the fast-tracking of asylum claim processing.¹⁸ This will permit Immigration Judges to reject asylum applications if not enough evidence is presented initially, create more barriers for asylum applicants to obtain work authorizations while their applications are pending, and generally reject any requests for additional time in Immigration Court.

¹⁵ See <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/5/text>.

¹⁶ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/ice-rescinds-directive-110053-on-using-a-victim-centered-approach-with-noncitizen-crime-victims/#/tab-policy-documents>.

¹⁷ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/eoir-acting-director-issues-memo-on-eoirs-office-of-legal-access-programs/#/tab-policy-documents>.

¹⁸ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/eoir-acting-director-reinstates-policy/#/tab-policy-documents>.

- On February 14, 2025, DHS' U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) suspended the adjudication of a wide variety of immigration benefits applications, such as asylum, TPS, adjustment of status) for parolees of distinct Biden administration programs (United for Ukraine; Cuban Haitian Nicaraguan Venezuelan Parole).¹⁹
- On February 24, 2025, DHS reduced the duration of an extension and redesignation of TPS for Haiti.²⁰ Currently, those granted TPS will have their TPS status terminated on August 3, 2025.
- On February 25, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security invoked a registration requirement for certain non-citizens, pursuant to Immigration and Nationality Law ("INA") § 262 and 8 CFR § 264.1.²¹ A failure to register may result in criminal and civil penalties, up to and including misdemeanor prosecution and the payment of fines.
- On February 26, 2025, ICE announced that it had contracted with the Delaney Hall facility in Newark, New Jersey to detain up to 1,000 non-citizens.²²
- On February 27, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security requested from the Internal Revenue Service the last known home addresses for non-citizens who had filed income tax returns.²³
- On March 25, 2025, DHS terminated humanitarian parole for those who had benefited from Cuban Haitian Nicaraguan Venezuelan Parole, leaving them immediately vulnerable to detention and removal from the United States.²⁴
- On April 11, 2025, EOIR issued guidance supporting the rejection of asylum applications without hearings if the application is deemed not deemed sufficiently

¹⁹ See <https://ukrainetaskforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/USCIS-Parolee-Benefits-Pause-Memo-February-14-2025.pdf>.

²⁰ See <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/24/2025-02970/partial-vacatur-of-2024-temporary-protected-status-decision-for-haiti>.

²¹ See <https://www.uscis.gov/alienregistration>.

²² See <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/ice-expands-detention-capacity-delaney-hall-facility-new-jersey>.

²³ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/reported-dhs-asks-irs-for-information-about-undocumented-immigrants/>.

²⁴ See <https://www.federalregister.gov/public-inspection/2025-05128/termination-of-parole-processes-cubans-haitians-nicaraguans-and-venezuelans>.

legally detailed.²⁵ This will have particular impact on those who received pro se assistance filing for asylum through New York City’s Asylum Application Help Center or other informal legal clinics. With those pro se asylum filings, the main priority was often to file a minimal asylum application for the purpose of triggering the start of the “150 day” clock for the non-citizen’s asylum-based employment authorization eligibility. Many of these individuals now – without legal counsel – are extremely vulnerable to having their asylum applications canceled or otherwise pretermitted, without the opportunity to have their day in Immigration Court to plead their case for asylum.

There has been considerable federal court litigation regarding much of the above-noted policy changes, leaving many non-citizen New Yorkers’ fates in precarious legal limbo when temporary restraining orders or preliminary injunctions are issued. Most recently and unfortunately, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision in *Noem v. National TPS Alliance*²⁶ allowing the Trump Administration to end both the 2021 and 2023 designations of Venezuelan TPS despite lower federal court rulings. This will be particularly devastating and destabilizing to recent Venezuelan migrants to New York City, leaving them without legal status and work permits, and making them vulnerable to detention and deportation now.

These nearly constant immigration policy changes also make it extremely challenging to conduct community legal education and provide limited scope immigration legal services assistance to non-citizens; the immigration legal landscape is changing too fast for many non-citizens to understand if they are eligible for immigration benefits on any given day. To help meet this need, LAS has redoubled our legal education efforts by hosting monthly immigration policy update roundtables with community members and by tracking the latest updates on our Know Your Rights hub on our website.²⁷

B. New York City Council Funding Requests – Immigration

We are grateful for the Council’s support for legal services for low-income immigrant New Yorkers, who are among the City’s most vulnerable populations. The Council’s commitment to ensuring

²⁵ See <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/media/1396411/dl?inline>.

²⁶ See <https://www.supremecourt.gov/docket/docketfiles/html/public/24a1059.html>.

²⁷ <https://legalaidnyc.org/news/critical-resources-immigrant-communities/>.

parity of justice and access to comprehensive legal services for our immigrant communities is central to our work and establishes New York City's approach as among the most progressive in the nation. Thanks to support from the New York City Council and the Human Resources Administration, LAS currently conducts the following immigration-related programs:

- 1) **The New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP)**, a collaboration between The Legal Aid Society, Brooklyn Defender Services, and The Bronx Defenders, has represented over 4,000 detained immigrants facing deportation since 2014, helping to ensure New York families are not separated simply because they cannot afford an attorney. The nation's first universal legal representation program for detained immigrants, NYIFUP provides high quality, holistic representation to New Yorkers detained and facing deportation who cannot afford an attorney. Our NYIFUP team manages a full caseload of deportation defense cases, and provide services including representation at master calendar, bond, and individual merits hearings before the Immigration Court, appeals in front of the Board of Immigration Appeals and federal circuit courts, and comprehensive social work services. Many of our NYIFUP clients are long-term permanent residents or other non-citizens with strong family ties and long work histories in this country.

As of May 4, 2025, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security detained over 49,005 non- citizens nationwide.²⁸ As has been the trend over the last few years, ICE has increasingly arrested New Yorkers in New York City and then detained them in facilities hundreds of miles away, including in Western Pennsylvania, at the Moshannon Valley Processing Center, Buffalo Service Processing Center in Upstate New York, Plymouth County Correctional Facility, in Burlington, Massachusetts, and detention facilities across the southern part of the United States. This practice of detaining NYC residents all over the country has made it more difficult for us to identify and provide representation to these NYC residents.

²⁸ See Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, <https://tracreports.org/immigration/quickfacts/detention.html>.

Since its inception and increasingly over the past several years, NYIFUP, this City Council, and other immigration advocates have held ICE accountable for egregious illegal detention trends of our neighbors, families, and friends. Most recently, we have called attention to needless and egregious suffering our clients endure at detention centers such as withheld medical care, racist behavior, violations of attorney client privileged mail and communications, and persistent access to counsel issues. The need for advocacy and legal representation on behalf of our fellow New Yorkers is more critical than ever as ICE continues to collaborate with local Department of Corrections officers to forcibly incarcerate New Yorkers and abduct them from our communities.

NYIFUP providers are the City's and statewide experts in defending these New Yorkers who are at imminent risk of being removed from the United States, and likely forever separated from their families here. Our NYIFUP clients are now fighting against their removal not only in Immigration Court, but also against unlawful removals under the Alien Enemies Act and this government's efforts to detain non-citizens to third countries. We must have more resources to meet the more complex reality of detained deportation defense. To that end, **The Legal Aid Society is respectfully requesting \$33,200,000 for NYIFUP in Fiscal Year 2026, split by the three NYIFUP providers, with an award of \$11,066,666 to LAS.**

- 2) **The Unaccompanied Minor Children and Families (UMFI) Initiative** has been providing legal assistance to Unaccompanied Children and Adults with Children fleeing endemic gang violence and domestic abuse since 2014, with the support of the New York City Council. Over the past 4 years, an average number of 137,379 unaccompanied children (UCs) entering the United States yearly,²⁹ with some of these children finding themselves trapped into exploitative child labor situations, as the New York Times has

²⁹ U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Stats and Summaries (Nationwide Encounters), <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters> (147,975 in FY21; 152,880 in FY22; 137,992 in FY23; 110,672 in FY24).

repeatedly documented.³⁰ Others are released to supportive sponsors, including many in New York City. This traumatized and vulnerable population is especially in need of highly competent legal representation to advance their claims for asylum, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), and other forms of immigration relief.

Over the past decade, but with a dramatic increase since spring 2022, the City has also seen an extraordinary influx of Adults with Children (AWC) families. Such cases involve multiple complex immigration legal matters, including expert evaluations, multiple relief applications that need to be submitted by different members of the same family unit, labor-intensive trials to prepare for, and particularly thorny ethical issues when clients' interests sometimes diverge. The demand for legal screenings and full representation of these AWC family units are ever increasing and LAS' work is desperately needed, as it is one of the few organizations with significant expertise in handling complex asylum, Special Immigrant Juvenile status, U and T nonimmigrant status, and deportation defense in Immigration Court removal proceedings.

Since January 2025, the federal government has cut funding for other agencies, including sibling organizations in New York City, who focus on working with unaccompanied children, leaving devastated, unrepresented, and increasing demand for services on LAS to help meet this newly created gap in services. Even despite on-going litigation to push back against these sudden cuts, the demands on LAS' expertise in handling unaccompanied children's matters has never been more keenly felt.

The Legal Aid Society is respectfully requesting an enhancement to \$1,750,000 for UMFI in Fiscal Year 2026. The requested budget increase will allow us to fully cover the cost of the staff dedicated to this project. LAS has not received an increase in UMFI funding since FY22.

³⁰ Hannah Dreier, "Labor Department Denounces Surge in Exploited Minor Children," New York Times (July 27, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/27/us/migrant-child-labor.html>; Hannah Dreier, "Alone and Exploited, Migrant Children Work Brutal Jobs Across the U.S.," New York Times (Feb. 25, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/25/us/unaccompanied-migrant-child-workers-exploitation.html>.

- 3) The Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI)** serves immigrants and new Americans who are seeking citizenship, permanent residence, or another immigration status or are seeking employment legal services after having been exploited by their employers. Legal services are provided through our Immigration Law Unit, Employment Law Unit, with an infrastructure of 13 subcontracting agencies, including legal services providers and community-based organizations with deep ties to marginalized communities. In FY24, LAS and our subcontractors handled over 4,500 cases for individuals seeking assistance with an immigration, employment, or family law matter.

For IOI, what has been most successful and effective is the flexibility of its contract and its priority to full legal representation, especially for those in Immigration Court. We will not be able to protect non-citizens from detention and deportation by focusing primarily on limited scope models of representation.

Further, LAS is concerned about the City's termination of its own investment in its own limited scope immigration legal assistance, the Asylum Application Help Center (AAHC), and its satellite offices throughout the city, effective June 30, 2025. While there are both benefits and insufficiencies to any limited scope immigration legal service model, the AAHC provided a critical baseline of help for those in city shelters. The City's removal of the AAHC from the immigration legal services ecosystem, without a redistributed infusion of support to existing legal service providers – including LAS and our subcontractor infrastructure- , leaves many of these new migrants in highly volatile legal situations, without means to understand immigration policy changes or help to navigate through. LAS is deeply concerned that many new migrants will end up without means to help them reapply for employment authorization or other immigration benefits, will not understand their eligibility for immigration relief, and will also not be prepared to gird themselves against potential detention and removal from the United States during this federal administration. This is not the time to divest from community education and robust legal services. We must adapt, pivot, and respond whatever comes our way.

Currently, there is an active procurement for IOI entitled, “Office of Civil Justice – Immigration Opportunity Initiative and Low Wage Worker Legal Services (IOI/LWW)” in the Procurement and Sourcing Solutions Portal (“PASSPort”), with a deadline for responses until September 15, 2025. The solicitation is ill-timed and ill-prepared to address the quickly-changing legal environment. However, we remain hopeful that there will ultimately be a fair, robust, and comprehensive RFX process for the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative which prioritizes full legal representation services.

- 4) **The Low-Wage Worker Initiative (LWWI)** serves low-wage and unemployed workers who live or work in the City of New York. who are seeking enforcement of workers’ rights. The LWWI is the only dedicated City funding for workers’ rights, which allows LAS and its sister organizations to help raise up New Yorkers mired in poverty by seeking justice for victims of wage theft, discrimination, and other workplace abuse. Most of LAS’s cases involve violations of wage-and-hour laws, workplace discrimination, family and medical leave, labor trafficking, and claims for unemployment insurance. In its discrimination cases, ELU assists the most vulnerable New Yorkers who are sexually harassed, discriminated against based on race, national origin, immigration status, pregnancy, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, status as a domestic violence victim, or criminal background, or who are denied reasonable accommodations needed due to pregnancy or disabilities. Low-wage jobs are disproportionately held by immigrants, women, young people, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ people. This work is particularly critical now given the federal government’s attacks on LBGTQ+ and undocumented workers. LAS’s work directly contributes to improving the health, safety, and stability of low-wage workers and their families. In FY24, LAS assisted individuals in over 550 employment cases under the LWWI. **The Legal Aid Society is asking for renewal of \$580,596 in this funding for Fiscal Year 2026.**

C. Conclusion

We thank the City Council for its generous support of immigration legal services, which allow us to serve some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Deborah Lee', written on a light-colored background.

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

**TESTIMONY BEFORE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL'S
COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION**

Presented on March 6, 2025

My name is Deborah Lee, and I am the Attorney-in-Charge of the Immigration Law Unit (ILU) at The Legal Aid Society (LAS). Throughout our nearly 150-year history, LAS has been a tireless advocate for those least able to advocate for themselves. Over 2,300 staff members operate across all five New York City boroughs in our Civil, Criminal Defense, and Juvenile Rights Practices – guided by the fundamental principle that nobody should be denied justice because of poverty. Combining the expertise gained from representing clients across diverse areas of law with the broader public policy perspective of an advocacy group, we lift up marginalized individuals and enable them to advance themselves and their families. Part direct legal services provider, part social justice defenders, we have a unique ability to go beyond individual issues to affect change at a societal level.

Since the 1980s, LAS has maintained a citywide Immigration Law Unit (ILU) within the Civil Practice. ILU, now comprised of over 88 staff, is a recognized leader in the delivery of free, comprehensive, and high-caliber immigration legal services to low-income immigrants in New York City and surrounding counties. Staff represent immigrants before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), before immigration judges in removal proceedings, on appeals to the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), and in federal court on *habeas corpus* petitions and petitions for review. Over the most recent year, ILU assisted in over 8,500 individual legal matters benefiting over 21,100 New Yorkers citywide. In addition to direct legal services, we conduct outreach presentations with community members and grass-roots organizations and provide critical immigration legal information to New Yorkers through our Know Your Rights hub on our website¹ and our dedicated legal helpline telephone bank. We also provide regular trainings to immigrant-serving advocates from community-based organizations, state and local agencies, and judicial and legislative staff. Partnerships with other non-profit organizations and coordination of a successful *pro bono* program with nearly 70 participating law firms enable the ILU to maximize resources to meet the increasing demand for representation.

¹ <https://legalaidnyc.org/news/critical-resources-immigrant-communities/>.

LAS' testimony here presents our challenges under the current Trump administration as well as our funding requests for our New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP), Youth, and federal litigation, and Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI)-related work.

Immigrants built our great City, and we are proud to honor our own histories, our loved ones, friends, and neighbors. LAS is committed to fighting for immigrants' rights on all of these fronts and respectfully calls upon this committee to take bold action in these turbulent times, and to lead this City in protecting the rights of non-citizen New Yorkers.

A. Trump 2.0 and Its Already Devastating Impact on New York City

Despite persistent challenges during the Biden administration, Trump 2.0 has already created pernicious barriers for non-citizen New Yorkers, as well as non-citizens generally in this country. Since January 20, 2025, the current Trump administration has issued over 165 policy actions that impact and harm non-citizens in this country.² Some of the most devastating actions include:

- On January 20, 2025, the Trump Administration sought to deny U.S. citizenship to those born in this country, specifically for two classes of children born after February 19, 2025: (a) a child of an unlawfully-present mother if the father is not a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident (LPR); and (b) a child of a mother with temporary status (e.g., a non-immigrant visa, Temporary Protected Status, etc.) if the father is not a U.S. citizen or LPR.³
- On January 20, 2025, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security revoked long-standing guidance protecting certain locations from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) enforcement actions.⁴ ICE is fully encouraged now to conduct arrests and raids in

² See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/?after=2025-01-20>; see also https://www.nycbar.org/reports/the-trump-administrations-early-2025-changes-to-immigration-law/?back=1#_ftn12.

³ This Executive Order is currently enjoined pursuant to a Temporary Restraining Order issued in *Washington v Trump*, 2:25-cv-00127 (W.D.Wash.), <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/25502861/tro-on-trump-executive-order-birthright-citizenship.pdf>.

⁴ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/dhs-rescinds-guidelines-for-enforcement-actions-in-or-near-protected-areas/#/tab-policy-overview>.

sensitive locations such as churches and religious sites, schools, funeral homes and hospitals. On January 22, 2025, ICE issued further guidance clarifying that it can and will conduct arrests in and near local courthouses, consistent with local laws, including in non-criminal courts.⁵

- On January 21, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security published notice in the Federal Register to fully expand Expedited Removal to any undocumented person who has been present in the United States for less than two years.⁶ If subject to Expedited Removal, that individual would be deprived of the right to present any defense before an Immigration Judge except in extremely limited circumstances; as a result, these individuals would be summarily detained and deported with no judicial review process.
- On January 25, 2025, ICE officials were instructed to comply with a quota of 75 arrests per day in each of its 25 field offices.⁷ Compared with 2024 ICE arrests nationally, this would result in a six-fold increase in ICE detentions nationwide.
- On January 29, 2025, the Immigration Court system issued guidance confirming that ICE would be allowed to freely arrest non-citizens attending Immigration Court hearings.⁸
- On January 29, 2025, the Immigration Court system rescinded its guidance to encourage the use of prosecutorial discretion in Immigration Court and Board of Immigration Appeals cases, which allowed for the dismissal of cases that were not enforcement priorities.⁹
- On January 29, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security revoked Temporary

⁵ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/ice-issues-interim-guidance-for-civil-immigration-enforcement-at-or-near-courthouses/#/tab-policy-documents>.

⁶ See <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/01/24/2025-01720/designating-aliens-for-expedited-removal>.

⁷ See <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2025/01/26/ice-arrests-raids-trump-quota/>.

⁸ See <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/media/1387301/dl?inline>.

⁹ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/eoir-acting-director-rescinds-pm-21-25/#/tab-policy-documents>.

Protected Status protections for Venezuelan nationals.¹⁰ Currently, those granted TPS based on the 2021 designation will have their TPS status terminated on September 10, 2025. Those who were granted TPS based on the 2023 designation will have their status terminate on April 7, 2025.

- On January 29, 2025, President Trump signed into law S.5, also known as the Laken Riley Act, which subjects non-citizens to mandatory detention for a wide range of offenses, including low level theft and shoplifting offenses.¹¹ This mandatory detention would be triggered not only where someone had been convicted of certain offenses but also when merely accused of them.
- On January 31, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued guidance saying that it is not required to consider whether an immigrant has been a victim of a crime when deciding whether to detain them.¹² This is alarming for those who may be in dangerous and vulnerable situations when ICE encounters them, leading to ICE to disregard crimes and maltreatment committed against unaccompanied children.
- On January 31, 2025, the Immigration Court system issued a directive undermining its Office of Legal Access Programs, which provides accreditation for nonprofits that use trained non-attorneys to provide legal assistance to indigent and vulnerable populations.¹³
- On February 3, 2025, the Immigration Court system issued guidance allowing the fast-tracking of asylum claim processing.¹⁴ This will permit Immigration Judges to reject

¹⁰ See <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/03/2025-02183/vacatur-of-2025-temporary-protected-status-decision-for-venezuela>.

¹¹ See <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/5/text>.

¹² See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/ice-rescinds-directive-110053-on-using-a-victim-centered-approach-with-noncitizen-crime-victims/#/tab-policy-documents>.

¹³ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/eoir-acting-director-issues-memo-on-eoirs-office-of-legal-access-programs/#/tab-policy-documents>.

¹⁴ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/eoir-acting-director-reinstates-policy/#/tab-policy-documents>.

asylum applications if not enough evidence is presented initially, create more barriers for asylum applicants to obtain work authorizations while their applications are pending, and generally reject any requests for additional time in Immigration Court.

- On February 20, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security revoked Temporary Protected Status protections for Haitian nationals.¹⁵ Currently, those granted TPS will have their TPS status terminated on August 3, 2025.
- On February 25, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security invoked a registration requirement for certain non-citizens, pursuant to Immigration and Nationality Law (“INA”) § 262 and 8 CFR § 264.1.¹⁶ A failure to register may result in criminal and civil penalties, up to and including misdemeanor prosecution and the payment of fines.
- On February 26, 2025, ICE announced that it had contracted with the Delaney Hall facility in Newark, New Jersey to detain up to 1,000 non-citizens.¹⁷
- On February 27, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security requested from the Internal Revenue Service the last known home addresses for non-citizens who had filed income tax returns.¹⁸

With the Trump 2.0 administration’s promise of mass deportations underway nationwide,¹⁹ our non-citizen family members, neighbors, and loved ones are being told repeatedly that ICE will hunt them down. Non-citizens in New York City – whether recent arrivals or long term residents - no longer feel safe accompanying their children to school, seeking medical care, attending a religious service, or even going to their own Immigration Court hearing because they fear that ICE will summarily detain and deport them.

¹⁵ See <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/24/2025-02970/partial-vacatur-of-2024-temporary-protected-status-decision-for-haiti>.

¹⁶ See <https://www.uscis.gov/alienregistration>.

¹⁷ See <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/ice-expands-detention-capacity-delaney-hall-facility-new-jersey>.

¹⁸ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/reported-dhs-asks-irs-for-information-about-undocumented-immigrants/>.

¹⁹ See <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/02/01/us/politics/ice-arrests-trump-immigration.html>.

LAS calls upon City Council to meet this historical moment by doing whatever it can to protect non-citizens in New York City. Respectfully, the two most critical and immediate actions City Council should take are:

- Fight any attempt to bring ICE back to Rikers or to remove sanctuary city protections in New York City; and
- Increase funding support organizations fighting on behalf of non-citizens.

B. New York City Council Funding Requests – Immigration

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Currently, there is an active procurement for IOI entitled, “Office of Civil Justice – Immigration Opportunity Initiative and Low Wage Worker Legal Services (IOI/LWW)” in the Procurement and Sourcing Solutions Portal (“PASSPort”), with a deadline for responses until September 15, 2025. The solicitation is ill-timed and ill-prepared to address the quickly-changing legal environment. However, we remain hopeful that there will ultimately be a fair, robust, and comprehensive RFX process for the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative which prioritizes full legal representation services.

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LGBTQ+ people. This work is particularly critical now given the federal government's attacks on LGBTQ+ and undocumented workers. LAS's work directly contributes to improving the health, safety, and stability of low-wage workers and their families. In FY24, LAS assisted individuals in over 550 employment cases under the LWWI. **The Legal Aid Society is asking for renewal of \$580,596 in this funding for Fiscal Year 2026.**

C. Our Work in Immigration Court

LAS continues to face multiple challenges before New York City Immigration Courts, each of which contributes to the increased amount of time and effort our staff must expend to provide zealous representation to our clients.

Our Immigration Court removal defense litigation has continued with a mix of in-person and WebEx appearances, both of which have been hampered by incredible inadequacies. It is not unusual for an Immigration Court judge to fail to rule on a pending motion for months on end, for the Immigration Court to not have a required interpreter available, or to cancel a final trial in Immigration Court within minutes of the hearing's start time, with no explanation or immediate rescheduling of the court hearing. These common occurrences cost our staff, clients, witnesses, and experts hundreds of lost hours and repeatedly deny our clients access to justice.

Despite some welcome efficiency with WebEx video conferencing for court hearings, including shorter Master Calendar hearings, it remains frustrating that New York City Immigration Courts defer to each individual Immigration Judge as to their personal preference to have parties appear in person or via WebEx. Further, each of the three New York City Immigration Courts has consistently refused to provide up-to-date information about and reliable means to communicate with court clerks or legal assistants. Further, in the last two weeks, Immigration Court websites removed all phone numbers and email addresses for court personnel, eliminating any means of communication between attorneys and the court clerks and judges and making it near impossible to obtain accurate information about upcoming hearings.

During the Biden Administration, there was a rise in of the government's exercise of prosecutorial

discretion. This was a positive development, as it not only helped clients who were deemed to be lower ICE enforcement priorities the opportunity to regularize or otherwise pursue immigration status in a non-adversarial process before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services but also reduced the Immigration Court backlog for others waiting for their final trial. During the Biden Administration, ICE prosecutors in Immigration Court were often agreeing to dismiss cases or to exercise other forms of favorable discretion on a case-by-case basis. This all quickly disappeared on January 29, 2025 when Sirce Owen, Acting Director of the U.S. Department of Justice's Immigration Court system, rescinded Biden administration immigration enforcement priorities for removal and its accompanying guidance encouraging ICE prosecutors to exercise their discretion. As a result, ICE prosecutors are not able to exercise their own professional discretion to establish priorities in their handling of Immigration Court cases, forcing everyone to remain in backlogged Immigration Court proceedings for years with no resolution.

D. Our NYIFUP-Related Work

Providing immigration legal services to those who are detained by ICE is incredibly challenging for a variety of reasons, including that Immigration Court hearings are conducted at an extremely rapid pace, their cases often involve more complex legal analyses than those who are not detained by ICE, and their incarceration in and of itself is traumatizing and devastating for their families. However, two developments have made this work even more challenging: the detention of New Yorkers outside of the New York/New Jersey region which exacerbates communication and representation challenges and the increased detention of non-citizens under the current Trump administration.

For the most part, New Yorkers are no longer locally detained by ICE. ICE's New York City Field Office routinely arrests non-citizen New Yorkers in New York City and then detains them in facilities hundreds of miles away, including in the Orange County Correctional Facility in Goshen, New York, at the Moshannon Valley Processing Center in western Pennsylvania, at Buffalo Service Processing Center in upstate New York, at the Plymouth County Correctional Facility in Burlington, Massachusetts, and at detention facilities across the southern region of the United States. This practice of detaining NYC residents all over the country has made it more difficult for us to identify and provide representation to non-citizen New Yorkers.

Challenges in Identifying and Screening Non-Citizen New Yorkers for NYIFUP Immigration Legal Representation

When non-citizen New Yorkers were detained locally in the New York and New Jersey region, their Immigration Court proceedings were located locally as well, at the Varick Street Immigration Court in lower Manhattan. LAS and our other NYIFUP partners built professional working relationships with the Immigration Court and ICE prosecutors to allow NYIFUP staff to intake and screen unrepresented non-citizens during initial court hearings; this helped all stakeholders with creating more efficient and manageable dockets and helped NYIFUP identify non-citizen New Yorkers who needed Immigration Court representation.

Unfortunately, with the detention of non-citizen New Yorkers outside of the New York and New Jersey region, NYIFUP partners do not have the existing relationships with Immigration Court and ICE prosecutors in other jurisdictions, and there is no streamlined system to allow LAS or its NYIFUP partners to intake and screen non-citizen New Yorkers in other venues. Further, despite much effort by NYIFUP providers, these government stakeholders elsewhere have shown limited interest in collaborating to allow us to identify and potentially represent non-citizens on their dockets. After considerable advocacy and coalition-building with legal service provider near the Moshannon Valley Processing Center, NYIFUP providers receive referrals of individuals who might be eligible for our services. These organizations have extremely limited staffing and capacity though and we have often received referrals too late in the Immigration Court process and non-citizen New Yorkers often have already been ordered removed by the time we are able to contact them in detention.

As LAS and our NYIFUP partners have faced resistance when trying to gain access to intake and screen non-citizen New Yorkers in other non-New York City based Immigration Courts, LAS has developed creative strategies to help identify non-citizen New Yorkers in detention. In addition to receiving referrals directly from affected New York families and loved ones, LAS has recently started a court observation program with students at Fordham Law School to help us flag any unrepresented New York City residents being held at the Moshannon Valley Processing Center, as their Immigration Court proceedings are located at the Elizabeth, New Jersey Immigration Court. While these non-court based intake and screening systems appear fruitful, they involve considerable time and involvement for our staff.

Challenges in Advocating Against Unlawful Detentions of Non-Citizen New Yorkers Detained In Remote Locations

LAS faces significant obstacles litigating habeas petitions to challenge the unlawful detention of those detained in remote facilities, including the reality of little to no available *pro bono* counsel options locally to litigate near these immigration detention facilities and ICE’s practice of transferring individuals without notice while habeas petitions are being prepared. As most federal courts have concluded that a habeas petition may only be filed in the district where an individual is confined, it may be difficult or impossible to obtain habeas counsel who is barred in the relevant district court and, even if habeas counsel is secured in a particular jurisdiction, there is no guarantee that such jurisdiction will be the proper venue for filing once the habeas is prepared.

LAS continues to explore and expand the ways in which we challenge ICE detention of non-citizen New Yorkers. LAS have begun challenging the adequacy and availability of bond proceedings for non-citizen New Yorkers who are transferred outside of the New York region by filing civil complaints under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) principles.²³ If a detained immigrant is challenging the adequacy of bond procedures in New York Immigration Court, then venue is proper in the Southern District of New York, given that most events will have transpired, and at least one government defendant is based, in that district. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1391(e)(1) (permitting venue “in any judicial district in which (A) a defendant in the action resides [or] (b) a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claim occurred”).

Increased Detention of Non-Citizens Under the Current Trump Administration

The second recent development that has made working in NYIFUP more challenging is the increased enforcement under the current Trump administration. Trump 2.0 campaigned with the promise of mass deportations and, since the election, has increased ICE arrests and deportations of non-citizens in

²³ Our Immigration Law Unit’s federal litigation team has been at the forefront of immigration detention litigation for several years. With separate private foundation seed funding which has since expired, we have developed litigation materials on the properness of a civil complaint to challenge immigration detention proceedings. It provided technical assistance to a partner organization in *Valez–Chavez v. McHenry*, prepared a complaint and briefing for its own challenge in *L.M.U. v. King*, and obtained an amicus brief from the Constitutional Accountability Center in *L.M.U.* Our own case, *L.M.U.*, mooted out when ICE voluntarily released our client from custody ahead of the government’s reply brief deadline. We recently commenced litigation on this issue in another case, *M.S.G. v. Neal*, Case No. 23-9859-JMF (SDNY), on behalf of a New Yorker who was detained by ICE and transferred between four different ICE facilities, undermining his ability to seek habeas relief. After filing a complaint and motion for a temporary restraining order, the government agreed to provide the relief sought: a new bond hearing in which ICE was required to demonstrate, by clear and convincing evidence, that M.S.G.’s continued detention was necessary.

this country. To further support these efforts, ICE has recently announced the imminent opening of the Delaney Hall Facility in Newark, New Jersey, with a bed space for 1,000 new detainees.²⁴ This will most likely lead to more ICE arrests of non-citizens in New York City region and, given NYIFUP's limited resources, will put incredible strain on our staff to meet the increased demand for immigration legal services for these non-citizen New Yorkers.

We also anticipate an increase in detention based on Congress's recent passage of the Laken Riley Act, which mandates the detention without bail of certain noncitizens arrested or charged with certain crimes.²⁵ These crimes include burglary, theft, larceny, shoplifting, assaulting a police officer, or crimes that result in death or serious bodily injury.²⁶ Given the dramatic shift in imposing mandatory ICE detention of non-citizens who may merely accused of low-level shoplifting or theft offenses, many more non-citizens are at risk of ICE detention than ever before. LAS anticipates that many non-citizen New Yorkers merely accused of low-level offenses will be detained both locally and nationwide, as part of this dragnet to advance Trump 2.0's mass deportation efforts.

Persistent Challenges Representing Non-Citizen New Yorkers in ICE Custody

Separate from these current trends of detaining non-citizen New Yorkers outside of the New York/New Jersey region and the increased detention of non-citizens under the current Trump administration, LAS continues to face persistent challenges in representing our NYIFUP clients generally. As we know from prior and current experience, detention jeopardizes access to counsel. As an example of this, we are constantly dealing with access to counsel issues at Orange County Correctional Facility (OCCF). The space in the OCCF that is set aside for in-person visits, sometimes referred to as the "glass house," is a room divided by a glass wall with a phone for communication. There is usually at least one correctional officer within earshot and frequently there are also other detained people meeting with their advocates. This makes it extremely difficult to have confidential conversations about past trauma, fear of gangs, or to dive into the personal details that an attorney must know to properly advise their clients and prepare them for trial. Some of the people we represent understandably refuse to meet with us in person given the confidentiality concerns. Although NYIFUP providers have repeatedly requested consistent

²⁴ <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/ice-expands-detention-capacity-delaney-hall-facility-new-jersey>.

²⁵ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/5>.

²⁶ See *id.*

access to confidential meeting spaces with our clients at the facility, OCCF leadership and ICE have refused to allow for this.

Additionally, in-person visits at OCCF present language access issues when attorneys and clients do not speak a common language. The “glass house” telephones—the only mechanism by which an attorney and detained person may effectively communicate—make it nearly impossible for attorneys to communicate with their clients when they do not speak the same language. The only way to do so is to bring an interpreter in-person with the attorney; however, attorneys have often been restricted in bringing interpreters or other individuals with them on legal visits.

Our ability to adequately represent clients is significantly hampered by their detention. For years we have had issues communicating with clients behind bars, but these challenges have only been exacerbated by the recent increase in detention which has led to other serious disease outbreaks, such as the recent tuberculosis outbreak at OCCF which has resulted in quarantining an entire unit. Video conference services repeatedly fail, often with technical malfunctions where one party cannot hear the other, or the call fails to connect altogether. Efforts to correct these issues are sometimes resolved by individual officers, but often are not. Sometimes attorneys must wait days to be able to speak with their clients, even with pending trials looming on the horizon. Further, NYIFUP attorneys have at times had to prepare clients for their trial testimony using video technology where the audio portion was non-functional. Attorneys resorted to using dry-erase boards, or pieces of paper, to communicate messages to their clients visually and to prepare them for their final hearings which would determine whether they would be deported or permitted to remain in this country with loved ones.

Calls have varied, ranging from issues with OCCF’s video technology to a lack of staff available to facilitate the call. Officials at OCCF have consistently failed to respond to requests for assistance in restoring a reliable system of communication. ICE has at times allowed for 15-20 minute “legal phone calls,” which are appropriate to convey a brief message or a rescheduled court date at most, and woefully insufficient for people preparing testimony for their multi-hour trials, where a judge will determine whether or not they can remain in this country and ultimately their freedom. Developing the necessary attorney-client communication and trust is impossible by 15-20 minute calls.

Video calls are also extremely difficult to schedule. On any given day, there are only 14 timeslots longer than 25 minutes available for an entire housing unit which can house more than 40 people, and three of those time slots are after 7:00PM. Once a time slot is filled, it is no longer available for anyone in the unit to use. When considering the number of NYIFUP advocates, private attorneys, and other representatives attempting to schedule a call to clients at OCCF, this is clearly insufficient to meet the needs of the demand of representation.

As a result of the limitations on access to counsel, we often must communicate through calls made with new video tablets provided by OCCF. Tablets are often left uncharged or are taken away in retaliation for a perceived infraction or for speaking out against conditions of confinement. Sometimes clients are not informed that communicating with counsel through tablets is an option. Relying on tablets often jeopardizes confidentiality as the people we represent are forced to communicate with us in open spaces where other people are nearby, once again rendering our conversations non-confidential and hindering the free flow of often sensitive information that is necessary for us to provide effective legal representation.

OCCF, and other ICE detention facilities in New York State, have limited detained people's access to representation, making it less likely that they will be prepared for their trials, and thus more likely that they will be deported. Detention alone, particularly during the past few years, has become an access to counsel and due process issue by impeding detained people's ability to adequately prepare and gather evidence for their defense. NYIFUP is undermined by this.

E. Our Youth-Related Work

Since 2003, LAS's Youth Project has assisted undocumented non-citizen youth in New York City and surrounding counties who are in foster care, adoption, or guardianship, to obtain Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), allowing them to obtain green cards and other immigration benefits. The project also defends unaccompanied youth in removal proceedings.

LAS's Youth Project serves the legal needs of two vulnerable populations: (1) "undocumented immigrant youth," who are in foster care or in need of guardianship, custody, delinquency, or adoption arrangements, but who for the most part have not yet been detected by immigration authorities; and (2) "unaccompanied children" who have recently arrived in the United States without a parent, seeking to

escape endemic gang violence and/or extreme poverty in their home countries, and have been placed in removal proceedings after arrest and detention at the border. For the latter group, the lack of appointed counsel to help them navigate the complex immigration system and apply for immigration relief exacerbates their precarious situation.

LAS's Youth Project remains a leader amongst our fellow undocumented youth legal service providers. LAS leads the New York SIJS advocates' group, a bimonthly forum for immigrant youth legal service providers statewide to troubleshoot Family Court issues, discuss USCIS challenges, and brainstorm solutions to other developing legal issues. Approximately 40-50 advocates regularly attend the SIJS meetings, including officials from ACS.

The Youth Project also manages the SIJS-NY listserv, which includes hundreds of statewide legal service providers who can better represent their immigrant youth by maintaining contact with other experienced service providers. Members of the Youth Project speak regularly at continuing legal education (CLE) events, and several have spoken at national conferences, including the American Immigration Lawyers Association's Immigrant Defense Conference, National Association of Counsel for Children's annual conference, and the American Bar Association's Unaccompanied Child Conference. Youth Project staff are asked to consult on matters having national impact, including strategizing about and conducting impact litigation, drafting amicus briefs, and commenting on proposed changes to regulations.²⁷

Below, we highlight current trends and challenges facing LAS' Youth Project and its work on behalf of immigrant youth.

Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) Representation and Meeting the Immense Needs of New Yorkers

²⁷ LAS also sits on the steering committee of the End SIJS Backlog Coalition (www.sijsbacklog.com), a group of directly-impacted youth and over 150 allied advocate organizations across the country, working to educate Congress, relevant administrative agencies and the public about the harmful impacts of visa caps on vulnerable immigrant children, and to advocate for an end to the SIJS backlog. In 2023, the Coalition released a new report detailing the drastic increase in youth caught in the SIJS backlog over the last two years and highlights the first-hand stories of SIJS youth²⁷. The Coalition also released several Practice Advisories throughout 2023 and engaged in national policy and advocacy aimed at reducing the backlog and the impact of the backlog on SIJS youth through legislative, regulatory and policy changes.

With New York City’s existing immigrant population and those who have more recently arrived, there is a tremendous need immigration legal representation for immigrant youth eligible for SIJS and are approaching their 21st birthday when they will age-out of eligibility. Within LAS’ Youth Project alone, we taken on for representation of emergency SIJS cases every month, rushing to prepare clients, filings, and constantly pushing for Family Court hearing dates before our clients age-out. This is in addition to our work with existing clients and other new clients who are not in absolute last-minute crisis.

To additionally respond to this community need for SIJS assistance, in 2024, LAS launched a “pilot project” through the Immigrant Children Advocates’ Relief Effort (ICARE) coalition that has helped streamline the SIJS application process. Through this project, the Youth Project has assisted over two dozen youth with filing pro se guardianship applications in Queens Family Court, a necessary step towards obtaining SIJS. ICARE has filed over 70 petitions through the pilot project. The project helps alleviate the burden on immigration legal providers at a time where the system is overwhelmed with applications for SIJS while ensuring that youth have counsel each step of the process.

In February 2025, the Youth Project integrated its work through the SIJS pilot project with ILU’s weekly legal clinics, utilizing volunteer attorneys and law school students to help build capacity to help with preparing the family court petitions for SIJS cases.

The SIJS Backlog and Deferred Action

As previously reported, in March 2022, USCIS announced a new policy that when a SIJS application is approved, the applicant will now be considered for deferred action, making SIJS- approved youth eligible for work authorization as well as hopefully protecting them from removal²⁸. However, in December 2022, all countries experienced a “retrogression,” meaning that even SIJS petitioners from non-oversubscribed countries could no longer simultaneously petition for SIJS and adjustment of status, i.e., apply for their green cards. In April 2023, the worldwide retrogression increased even further when USCIS removed El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala from their own separate category and lumped all countries together.²⁹ While SIJS recipients from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador experienced an

²⁸ <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/alerts/uscis-to-offer-deferred-action-for-special-immigrant-juveniles>.

²⁹ End SIJS Backlog Practice Alert: April 2023 Visa Bulletin Changes, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5fe8d735a897d33f7e7054cd/t/649dda1174b3073767a4101e/1688066577565/2023_March-visa-bulletin-changes-alert.pdf.

advance of several months, the rest of the world retrogressed *by years* – to September 2018. As of March 1, 2025, the priority date is only at August 16, 2019.

In practice, this means that SIJS-based adjustments have slowed to a trickle. However, with a grant of deferred action, SIJS-approved youth are eligible for a work permit that is valid for four years. This is an extremely welcome development to SIJS-approved youth caught in the “backlog,” which includes over 100,000 young people throughout the US, with more than 20,000 in New York State alone³⁰. Because the advent of deferred action for approved SIJS recipients was a simple change in policy, advocates fear that deferred action and its attendant work authorization will be easy to undo. With the current Trump Administration, we anticipate the elimination of SIJ Deferred Action and allowance of temporary work authorizations for Special Immigrant Juveniles while they await permission to apply for lawful permanent residency. Youth Project leaders, along with other leaders of legal services organizations throughout the U.S., have begun meeting about challenging any possible rescission of this immensely helpful policy.

LAS continues to monitor immigration law developments to assess how this impacts non-citizen youth, and LAS will continue to represent our clients in their quest for safety and permanency in this country. We will also continue to provide expert technical assistance to other practitioners in New York City, statewide, and nationally regarding best practices and arguments for all types of cases relating to immigrant youth.

F. Our Federal Work

Our Immigration Law Unit’s federal litigation team continues to be a leader in impact litigation to obtain protection for broad classes of non-citizens and achieves class action victories that protect thousands of non-citizens from arbitrary and cruel immigration policies. We also undertake litigation for individuals in federal district court and in the circuit courts of appeals to address systemic injustices in our immigration system. We craft innovative legal strategies, secure wins for our individual clients, and establish favorable precedents on emerging legal issues. We amplify our impact by facilitating partnerships and working groups, and we provide technical support to practitioners in New York and across the country.

³⁰ End SIJS Backlog Coalition, “False Hopes: over 100,000 Immigrant Youth Trapped in the SIJS Backlog,” <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5fe8d735a897d33f7e7054cd/t/656a48a3f02597441a4cbf95/1701464285675/2023-false-hopes-report.pdf>.

Challenging cruel, unconstitutional, and arbitrary immigration policies under the Administrative Procedure Act and the Due Process Clause

During the Trump Administration, LAS was at the forefront of challenging unlawful immigration policies. In *Make the Road et al. v. Cuccinelli*³¹ and *Make the Road et al. v. Pompeo*³², LAS, the Center for Constitutional Rights, and Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP, as well as the National Immigration Law Center on the *Pompeo* case, led litigation and advocacy to stop the public charge rules issued by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the U.S. Department of State (DOS), which threatened to penalize noncitizens for accessing vital benefit programs. In *Doe et al. v. Cuccinelli*, LAS partnered with Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP to bring a lawsuit on behalf of a noncitizen domestic violence survivor and several organizations to challenge the legality of Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) practice of making civil immigration arrests without a judicial warrant or court order in and around New York State courthouses. We stand prepared to fight for immigrants' rights once more on these issues and others, as the new Trump Administration reverts to its prior regressive policies and enacts new, devastating anti-immigrant measures.

Challenging unlawful detention

An unfortunate reality we face is that the U.S. Supreme Court is increasingly hostile to immigrants' rights. The Supreme Court has limited immigrants' access to the courts through traditional impact litigation vehicles, including class actions to challenge unlawful detention and deportation practices. The Supreme Court also has rejected statutory arguments that previously yielded uniform safeguards against arbitrary detention. As a result, individual habeas petitions that squarely address the constitutional limits of ICE's detention power are the primary check on ICE's arbitrary detention practices.

In *Velasco Lopez v. Decker*³³, LAS challenged the prolonged immigration detention of Mr. Velasco Lopez, a young man and former Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient, who entered the United States at the age of six. We prevailed with a landmark decision, in which the Second Circuit held that when the government seeks to detain a noncitizen under 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a) for a

³¹ Case 1:19-cv-07993-GBD (S.D.N.Y.).

³² Case 1:19-cv-11633-GBD (S.D.N.Y.).

³³ *Velasco Lopez v. Decker*, 978 F.3d 842 (2d Cir. 2020).

prolonged period of time, the government must justify such detention by clear and convincing evidence. This case has significant implications for our ability to secure the release of other noncitizen clients held in detention, which had been constrained by agency policies improperly requiring noncitizens to bear the burden in bond hearings. Our decision was cited extensively by the First Circuit in *Hernandez-Lara v. Lyons*³⁴, in which that court followed suit.

We have been at the forefront of litigation to enforce compliance with *Velasco Lopez*. ICE has urged courts to construe *Velasco Lopez* narrowly, thereby depriving detained individuals of essential due process guarantees. Through individual habeas actions, we have secured favorable district court decisions rejecting ICE’s interpretations. For example, in *J.C.G. v. Genalo*³⁵, ICE detained a New York City resident and asylum-seeker for nine months based on a single dismissed criminal case that arose from an interpretation error. While J.C.G. was detained, his partner struggled to make ends meet and support their three school-age children, the youngest of whom started kindergarten at a New York City public school this fall. ICE refused to provide our client, J.C.G., with a constitutionally adequate bond hearing, and argued that J.C.G. was required to undertake a time-consuming administrative appeal before vindicating his constitutional rights. We secured a habeas victory for J.C.G., in which a district court affirmed the core tenet that “[f]reedom from imprisonment — from government custody, detention, or other forms of physical restraint — lies at the heart of the liberty that [the Constitution’s Due Process Clause] protects” and rejected the government’s assertion that J.C.G. must exhaust his claims through a futile administrative appeal process.³⁶ The district court ordered that the government provide J.C.G. an adequate bond hearing, and at that hearing, and immigration judge ordered J.C.G. released on conditions and a minimal bond. J.C.G. was able to return to his family earlier this year.

Building on our work on securing fair bond hearings, we successfully litigated a challenge to prolonged, mandatory detention in *Keisy G.M. v. Decker*, which the Second Circuit decided last year in tandem with another case, *Black v. Decker*³⁷. Keisy G.M., a current NYIFUP client, is a longtime permanent resident from the Bronx who cared for his mother and young children, and who was an essential

³⁴ *Hernandez-Lara v. Lyons*, 10 F.4th 19 (1st Cir. 2021).

³⁵ *J.C.G. v. Genalo*, No. 24-cv-8755, 2025 WL 88831 (S.D.N.Y. Jan. 14, 2025). LAS has obtained similar district court decisions rejecting ICE’s expansive interpretation of administrative exhaustion in *O.F.C. v. Decker*, No. 22-cv-2255-JPC, 2022 WL 4448728 (S.D.N.Y. Sept. 12, 2022), and *B.S. v. Joyce*, No. 29-cv-9738-PKC, 2023 WL 1962808 (S.D.N.Y. Feb. 13, 2023).

³⁶ *J.C.G.*, 2025 WL 88831, at *7.

³⁷ 103 F.4th 133 (2d Cir. 2024).

worker for a medical linens supplier during the pandemic. ICE detained Keisy G.M. without notice early one morning in 2020 and locked him up in county jails for over a year and a half. The government refused to provide him a simple bond hearing, even though ICE eventually conceded that he is not dangerous and does not present a risk of flight. The Second Circuit decided in favor of Keisy G.M., holding that the government cannot detain noncitizens under 8 U.S.C. § 1226(c) for an unreasonably prolonged period of time without a bond hearing, where ICE must justify detention by clear and convincing evidence and where the judge considers the noncitizen's ability to pay and alternatives to detention. The government has petitioned the Second Circuit for a rehearing en banc. If the court grants rehearing, we will continue to litigate this case on behalf of Keisy G.M.

Under the new Administration, we have also seen an uptick in the number of noncitizen New Yorkers who are re-detained by ICE at their check-in appointments. We have developed sample litigation materials, including a habeas petition and a motion for a temporary restraining order, that advocates may consider filing in federal district court to prevent their clients' redetention.

➤ ***Securing access to the courts in an age of immigration transfers***

As previously noted, ICE routinely transfers immigrant New Yorkers to local jails in the southeastern United States and federal detention centers in Western Pennsylvania and the Buffalo region of upstate New York. Given the Trump Administration's efforts to detain more noncitizens and open new detention centers, we have already seen a higher rate of clients being transferred to facilities out of state, including as far as Washington state. These detained noncitizens are hundreds of miles from their communities, their counsel, and the courts. All of the challenges of litigating one's immigration case from detention are intensified by this distance. A host of new challenges arise as detainees in these remote jurisdictions face less favorable courts and caselaw.

An emerging challenge during this era of transfers is how to ensure that detained immigrants have access to non-immigration state court proceedings, such as pending criminal cases, family court proceedings, and other matters. LAS has developed litigation materials challenging ICE's failure to produce detained noncitizens for their court proceedings, including a sample petition for writ of habeas *ad testificandum* in federal district court. We have shared these materials with other advocates and continue to provide technical assistance on the issue. As ICE has ramped up its practice of transferring New Yorkers across the country without notice, LAS has been a leader in ensuring that detained individuals retain the

ability to seek review of their removal orders in the appropriate courts of appeals. LAS served as lead counsel in two Second Circuit petitions, filed by New Yorkers, in which the U.S. Attorney General sought to change venue to other circuit courts based on ICE's unilateral transfers of those individuals. We developed and shared briefs opposing such transfers, and we prevented improper changes of venue in both of our cases. We also co-authored two amicus briefs that detailed the ways in which the government's position on venue undermined fairness and was unworkable.

LAS has also been at the forefront of transparency efforts to compel ICE to provide information related to ICE's transfer of detained New Yorkers to remote detention facilities. Through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request filed with ICE, LAS sought and obtained data on transfers of individuals from the New York area, analyzed the data, and presented it to other advocates, in order to shed light on the scope of this practice and help inform our work on behalf of detained individuals. We also filed a lawsuit in federal district court, *The Legal Aid Society v. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement*³⁸, to obtain information on ICE's policies and practices related to transfers and obtained information through that lawsuit.

➤ ***Challenging unjust removal***

We also regularly undertake litigation challenging the government's increasingly over-broad interpretations of deportation statutes. In recent years, we have litigated several cases where immigration officials have classified minor criminal convictions as deportable offenses and have secured stipulated remands to the agency for further adjudication. For example, in *E.M.O. v. Garland*³⁹, we filed a petition for review challenging the agency's denial of asylum benefits based on cognitive disability, and secured a stipulated remand to the Board of Immigration Appeals to consider the case.

Our Second Circuit docket also includes several cases seeking to ensure that individuals who face torture in their home countries are not unfairly denied protection under the Convention Against Torture. In *M.A. v. Garland*⁴⁰, we prevailed before the Second Circuit, which agreed that the immigration judge and Board of Immigration Appeals had erred in its analysis of our client's torture claim. In partnership

³⁸ Case No. 24-cv-2344 (S.D.N.Y.).

³⁹ Case No. 21-6108 (2d Cir.) (motion for abbreviation of name filed).

⁴⁰ Case No. 19-728, 2021 WL 2878926 (2d Cir. July 9, 2021).

with Skadden Arps and several legal services organizations, we submitted an amicus brief in *Garcia-Aranda v. Garland*⁴¹, and identified a host of recurring errors in the Board of Immigration Appeals’ analysis of torture claims. The Second Circuit issued an important, precedential decision in *Garcia-Aranda*, clarifying that the agency had been construing Convention Against Torture requirements too narrowly. In *B.E.A. v. Garland*⁴², we challenged the unlawful removal order of a young man who had been persecuted and tortured by both gangs and police officers in El Salvador; soon after we filed our opening brief in August of 2024, we were able to secure a favorable remand so that the agency could reconsider the violence and harm that our client had experienced as a child. LAS also litigated *B.G.S. v. Garland*⁴³, with pro bono co-counsel at Debevoise & Plimpton LLP, to challenge the agency’s failure to meaningfully consider credible testimony from our client, his family members, and an expert witness that he will likely be tortured by gangs in Guatemala with the acquiescence of government officials. The Second Circuit heard oral argument in this case in October 2024 and a decision is pending.

LAS has also been on the forefront of efforts to ensure that individuals seeking protection from persecution and torture have access to the federal courts of appeals, even if they were previously ordered removed and have been placed in “withholding-only” proceedings. We have led and contributed to amicus briefing in the Second and Fourth Circuits on this issue and have developed model briefing to advocate for judicial review in individual cases. The U.S. Supreme Court is considering this issue and will hear oral argument later this month in a related case, *Riley v. Bondi*,⁴⁴ to resolve conflicting decisions between the federal courts of appeals.

We believe that our impact is greatest when we work in partnership with others. LAS co-facilitates the Second Circuit working group, which focuses on removal defense issues in the Second Circuit, and the New York-New Jersey-Pennsylvania habeas working group, which explores creative litigation to fight immigration detention. Each of these working groups operates a lively listserv and, on a quarterly basis, convenes practitioners from dozens of organizations and law firms litigating federal immigration cases in federal district court and the courts of appeals. Through these working groups, we touch the immigration and federal court cases of thousands of noncitizens who are not LAS clients.

⁴¹ 53 F.4th 752 (2d Cir. 2022).

⁴² Case Nos. 20-1752 & 24-1081 (2d Cir.).

⁴³ Case No. 23-6862 (2d Cir.).

⁴⁴ No. 23-1270 (S.Ct., argument scheduled Mar. 24, 2025).

In addition, in June of 2024, LAS organized a convening of over 40 immigration advocates to collaborate on challenges to detention under Section 235(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which authorizes no-bond detention for many recently arrived asylum-seekers. And in January 2025, our federal team presented free legal trainings on challenges to unlawful detention and petitions for review of removal orders in federal court. Hundreds of advocates attended these trainings.

G. Our Immigration Opportunities Initiative-related Work

The primary aim of the City's Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI) funding has been to ensure that more non-citizens would have access to full legal representation, including in complex immigration matters and removal proceedings. Through our IOI work, LAS has helped thousands of non-citizen New Yorkers obtain and/or secure their immigration status, avoid deportation, and fight back against unfair labor practices and exploitation. In FY24, LAS and our subcontractors handled over 4,500 cases for individuals seeking assistance with an immigration, employment, or family law matter. This work strengthens the social fabric of our city and benefits all New Yorkers, and LAS is committed to continuing its leadership in this area.

H. Conclusion

We thank the City Council for its generous support of immigration legal services, which allow us to serve some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers.

Respectfully submitted,



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



TESTIMONY OF:

**The New York Immigrant Family Unity Project Providers
Brooklyn Defender Services, Bronx Defenders, and Legal Aid Society**

Presented before

The New York City Council Committees on Immigration and Finance

Executive Budget Hearing – Immigration

May 27, 2025

Introduction

This testimony is submitted jointly by Bronx Defenders, Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS), and the Legal Aid Society (LAS). As the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP) providers, we serve hundreds of low-income immigrant New Yorkers challenging deportation each year. We are grateful to the New York City Council Committees on Immigration and Finance, in particular Chair Avilés and Chair Brannan, for the opportunity to testify about our budget needs to serve New York City’s immigrant community.

The New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP) is the nation's first-ever public defender program for immigrants facing deportation, specializing in representing people who are detained while they are in removal proceedings before an immigration judge. We also provide continued representation on immigration matters to our previously detained immigrant clients after securing their release from ICE custody. The NYIFUP program has been steadfast and strong during numerous surges in immigration enforcement over the past ten years. However, with the current unprecedented increase in enforcement and use of detention for many more immigrants, the need to build capacity has never been greater.

NYIFUP: The Experience and Expertise Needed to Meet this Moment

NYIFUP is the gold standard model for universal representation for immigrants facing deportation, providing comprehensive legal representation and wraparound support services for people in detained deportation proceedings. The program has been replicated in different municipalities across the nation. Since 2014, our offices have represented over 5,000 people in deportation

proceedings, providing representation and expertise in the complex legal issues that arise in these immigration cases.

Now more than ever, New York needs a strong and steadfast immigration defense program to meet the current unprecedented increase in enforcement and use of detention. Mass detention and deportation efforts have begun across this country, with New York City and those with criminal legal system involvement being particular targets. NYIFUP has over a decade of experience of serving New York immigrant communities in complex immigration matters in rapidly changing legal immigration landscapes. The complex nature of the cases our offices handle requires specialized expertise and extensive preparation and resources. Our offices have developed the expertise, training, and skill that are essential to meet this need in this moment.

In these unprecedented times, our offices have continued to represent immigrant New Yorkers, whether detained locally or taken to far away locations. In the case of the recent use of the Alien Enemies Act, we are facing the possibility of New Yorkers being removed to third countries with no due process. This unprecedented lack of due process is exactly why a flexible NYIFUP is so essential in the coming months and years ahead. Despite the numerous changes to detention and enforcement efforts that have already taken place, we expect additional dramatic changes, and our program must remain responsive and have the resources needed to adapt to the changes.

On April 18th, the Executive Office for Immigration Review (“EOIR”) issued a policy memorandum (PM 22-03)¹ restricting the use of administrative closure—a procedural tool that allows immigration judges to close removal proceedings under certain circumstances, for instance where the noncitizen is eligible to pursue an affirmative application for immigration status before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (“USCIS”). Pursuant to this memorandum, New York immigration courts have begun reopening large numbers of administratively closed cases. This shift has serious implications for NYIFUP practices who now face a sudden influx of clients requiring renewed representation in full removal proceedings.

On April 11th, EOIR issued a policy memorandum (PM 25-28)² permitting immigration judges to dismiss and reject asylum applications as legally insufficient without holding a hearing. Under this new policy, New York immigration courts are now denying asylum applications without providing noncitizens with a meaningful opportunity to present testimony and evidence and forcing immigration attorneys to litigate asylum cases on an extremely expedited timeline, necessitating greater representation resources for asylum seekers.

Additionally, both Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) and EOIR recently issued policy memoranda rescinding previous guidance facilitating the exercise of ICE’s prosecutorial discretion and the resolution of removal proceedings without full litigation.³ Prosecutorial discretion previously served as a critical tool for managing the overwhelming backlog in

¹ <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/media/1397161/dl?inline>

² <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/media/1396411/dl?inline>

³ <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/media/1387491/dl?inline>; <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/media/1388051/dl?inline>

immigration courts—now nearly 4 million cases⁴—but has ground to a near-total halt in light of these policy changes.

There has also been a significant increase in ICE’s detention capacity as part of an intensified enforcement strategy. This expansion includes the reopening of facilities such as Delaney Hall Detention Center in Newark, New Jersey at the beginning of May (which adds 1,000 beds to ICE’s detention capacity in the northeast).

Additionally, federal funding cuts to representation for immigrant youth and noncitizens living with mental illness and reduced funding for crime and trafficking victims have left many immigrants who previously had legal representation without the necessary support to navigate the immigration court system and, as a result, at heightened risk of detention and deportation.

Meeting Legal Service Needs Through Expertise in Complex Matters

NYIFUP seeks to preserve family unity for people facing deportation, keep individuals living and working in their communities, protect the legal rights of immigrants, reduce the number of people in immigration detention, and strengthen the fabric of immigrant communities. Our work is centered on our clients and, in addition to providing legal representation and counsel, we support the health and stability of people facing deportation and their family members by connecting them to essential services, such as healthcare, counseling, civil legal services, and other community-based support.

We witness everyday how these systems treat immigrant New Yorkers unequally. Even minor criminal offenses, often the result of over-policing, can end up leading to mandatory incarceration in DHS detention facilities, or permanent separation from family and exclusion from this country because of the entanglement of the criminal or family legal systems and our federal immigration laws.

An arrest alone, even where the District Attorney declines to prosecute or where a judge dismisses and seals the case, can lead to immigration detention for an immigrant. Current Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) enforcement policies prioritize detention of immigrants with criminal legal system contact and relies upon state and local criminal legal systems to identify immigrants who could be deported. In 2017, our offices experienced a 45% increase in cases. Since January 2025, we have witnessed a significant uptick in ICE enforcement in New York City, and we expect this will continue to increase.

Prosecutors in immigration court are no longer required to utilize their discretion to resolve or dismiss cases. Thus, immigrant New Yorkers are likely to remain in removal proceedings for years. Additionally, as we saw from 2016 to 2020 and have already seen in the past several months, there have been rapid changes in policies and legal authority which will require a close study by

⁴ <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/media/1344791/dl?inline>

immigration attorneys. With enhanced funding, NYIFUP will work to meet the demands of increased ICE enforcement and rapid changes to the law, provide technical assistance and training for our staff and partners, and continue to provide community-based Know-Your-Rights and education.

NYIFUP staff conduct intake in local immigration courts and are assigned to represent people who have been detained by ICE, are facing deportation proceedings, and who qualify for our legal services. Our staff work tirelessly to avoid deportation and to keep our clients with their families, in their communities. In addition to picking up newly assigned cases, NYIFUP providers currently represent over 1,000 people who have been released from detention, many of whom will require extensive support and litigation during the pendency of their cases. While we relied upon prosecutorial discretion under the Biden administration to stop deportations of many clients, this remedy has been eliminated, leading to increased delays in the resolution of non-detained proceedings. This requires more staff time for research, litigation, and advocacy—and over a longer period.

Meeting Community Need Through Education

With the support of this Council, we are also able to provide education and resources to the broader community and other legal providers. Outreach and public education are important components of our work defending the rights of immigrant New Yorkers, as ICE detention impacts all New Yorkers – the immigrant themselves, their families, their communities, their workplaces, their support networks, and other loved ones. Our offices will collaborate with long-standing local partners to offer legal technical assistance, Know Your Rights resources, and will continue to build upon community-facing resources to help us educate New Yorkers about ICE detention and what they can do.

In 2018, BDS developed [*We Have Rights*](#), a series of animated films in eight languages to help immigrants know what to do when confronted by ICE in the most common situations.

The Legal Aid Society has developed a [Know-Your-Rights hub](#), providing up-to-date information and resources about ICE encounters, detention, and other critical resources for New Yorkers.

Interdisciplinary Model of Immigration Defense

NYIFUP representation is provided by interdisciplinary teams of attorneys, social workers, and legal advocates who collaborate with clients to provide excellent legal representation and support through a long, confusing, and intimidating process. Our teams represent people with pending deportation cases before immigration courts, the Board of Immigration Appeal (BIA), and the Second and Third Circuit Courts of Appeals. We also provide representation in ancillary proceedings before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, New York State family courts, as well as in federal district and appellate courts.

NYIFUP's team of immigration social workers help clients and their families identify resources to address their needs, with a focus on connecting the people we serve to community-based services and providing support while they navigate the harms of the immigration system. Many of the

people we represent have serious mental health needs that are exacerbated by detention. The families of the people we represent also face extreme stress and hardship as a result of immigration detention. Detention removes parents, spouses, and support systems from our community. Our social work staff works to help address the harm of family separation to provide supportive services and connections to legal support and other resources to the families of those we represent.

Social workers collaborate with attorneys to advocate for the best outcomes for people we represent. Social workers assist with legal advocacy, often providing written reports, and other forms of support in immigration courts. They play an important role in mitigation, a key aspect of the process, which involves presenting mitigating circumstances to the court--which can help reduce the likelihood of deportation.

With ICE's current increase in immigration detention, NYIFUP clients now are facing prolonged detention and ineligibility for bond, especially after the passage of the Laken Riley Act⁵ and expansion of expedited removal.⁶ Social workers play a crucial role in supporting incarcerated clients facing prolonged detention, including providing case management, clinical counseling, and crisis intervention services. Beyond supportive counseling and wellness checks, social workers advocate for detained clients' medical and mental health needs and jail-based services, including following up regarding medical concerns, medications, and safety issues.

Expanding NYIFUP To Meet the Increased Need for Immigration Defense in New York

The three NYIFUP providers are seeking \$11,066,666 per organization, double our current budget, for the upcoming fiscal year. Increased funding in FY26 will enable us to:

- Adapt to changes in immigration enforcement
- Hire and onboard additional staff to meet increased need in immigration court
- Provide specialized legal technical assistance and outreach to community-based organizations regarding immigration detention
- Conduct a public education campaign to help New Yorkers understand their rights during ICE encounters and their options if a loved one is detained by ICE
- Continue to represent New Yorkers whose custody and removal cases are increasingly transferred to far-off jurisdictions
- File federal litigation to prevent the unlawful rendition and disappearance of immigrant New Yorkers under the Alien Enemies Act
- Provide representation to former clients who were granted immigration protection but whose cases have now been reopened by ICE.

⁵ S.5 - Laken Riley Act, available at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/5>.

⁶ https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/2025-01/25_0123_er-and-parole-guidance.pdf.

Conclusion

The City Council has played a critical role in safeguarding New York City's immigrant communities and established itself as a national leader in the creation of the NYIFUP program. We are grateful to this Committee and the Council for your recognition that immigrants make New York strong and your commitment to maintaining our status as a sanctuary city. We are proud to partner with the Council on initiatives like NYIFUP and look forward to continuing our work together. We thank the New York City Council for your continued support of low-income immigrant New Yorkers.

Rudrani Ghosh (Next100)

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Immigration's Executive Budget Hearing
Honorable Alexa Avilés, Chair

Re: Sustainably Addressing the Housing Needs of Asylum Seekers in the City

May 27, 2025

Dear Councilmembers,

New York City is on the precipice of two milestone moments: The Knicks have a shot at the NBA finals after [twenty-five years](#), and perhaps equally importantly, the city has the chance to positively alter the lives of nearly [42,700](#) asylum seekers still living in temporary shelters.

I was surprised to find that the Committee on Immigration's executive budget hearing neglected to mention housing, even though the city's current housing policy is expensive and inadequate. The city [spent](#) \$5.22 billion in shelters, food, and other emergency costs to support asylum seekers between FY 2023 and FY 2024. In the last year, a majority of asylum seekers have been forced out of the shelter system either through the [thirty-day and sixty-day notices](#), or through [sporadic](#), cross-borough shelter placements, which have made it difficult for asylum seekers to build community, get consistent [schooling](#) for their children, and find stability in a new city. What started out as an emergency, requiring short-term, rapid response efforts for more than 200,000 asylum seekers, is now a long-term housing crisis, unsustainable without a change in approach.

To meet the moment, the city needs to pivot its housing policy to support the asylum seekers that remain in shelters by providing them with a permanent housing solution. This is doable under the city's current budget. The city is poised to spend [\\$3.3 billion](#) in FY 2025 for the 42,700 asylum seekers still living in shelters—an average of \$77,283 per person in one year. That's **2.6 times more** than the annual cost of a one-bedroom apartment at [fair market rent](#). Instead of continuing to waste city resources on undignified, substandard, temporary housing for asylum seekers, the city should provide one-year housing vouchers to give asylum seekers the chance to stand on their feet.

Nearly [80 percent](#) of those remaining in shelters are families with minor children, 17 percent are single adults, and 3 percent are adult families.¹ The Department of Housing Preservation and Development's [guidelines](#) for affordable housing rates at 30 percent area median income are \$815 for a studio, \$873 for a one-bedroom, \$1048 for a two-bedroom. Some back-of-the-envelope math suggests that to provide a housing voucher to *every* asylum seeker currently in shelter would cost roughly \$537,115,020.² That's \$295 million less than the city's [revenue](#) if

¹ The last reported numbers from the City are from February 2025.

² The math: 35,640 families with children x \$1048 (two bedroom) x 12 months = 448,208,640; 7,591 single adults x \$815 (studio) x 12 months = 74,239,980; 14,000 adult families x \$873 (1 bedroom) x 12 months = 14,666,400; Σ = \$537,115,020.

(when) the Knicks make it to the finals this year, and *billions* less than continuing to house these families in shelters.

In winter 2024, I surveyed fifty asylum seekers across Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan about their housing experiences in the city, including shelter stays, searches for housing, and prospects for work.³ Two statistics stood out to me: 70 percent of respondents said they would only want a voucher until they found work, and 82 percent have applied for work permits. Asylum seekers are more than ready and willing to work and contribute to New York's economy, and they do not expect the city to perpetually tend to their needs. At this moment, they need a boost—like a housing voucher—to get out of a temporary housing system that is hemorrhaging city funds and is unsustainable for both the city and asylum seekers. This boost will not only help thousands of people get started on the path of stability, but will also better position them to *add* to the [\\$18.4 billion](#) in spending power and [\\$2.7 billion](#) in state and local taxes that immigrants contribute in New York.

The stakes are incredibly high for both the Knicks and our newest New Yorkers. And while the New York City Council may not be scoring any buzzer-beaters, the City does have the opportunity to make an equally momentous play that could change the lives of thousands of people and their children. I urge the City to shift its financial focus from temporary, crisis-oriented housing solutions to more meaningful, permanent housing solutions, such as an affordable housing voucher that would alleviate poverty, add stability, and dignify the lives of asylum seekers and their children.

Thank you for your time and your work on bettering the lives of asylum seekers in the city.

Rudrani Ghosh

Rudrani Ghosh is a policy analyst at [Next100](#), a non-traditional think tank designed to center people with lived experience at the forefront of policymaking.

³ A complete analysis and report from this survey will be available [here](#) in July 2025.



TESTIMONY
of
WORKER'S JUSTICE PROJECT (WJP)
Proyecto Justicia Laboral

Presented to:
New York City Council Committee on Immigration
Hon. Alexa Aviles, Chair of the Immigration Committee
Mayo 27, 2025

Prepared By:

Alejandro Grajales

Members of Worker's Justice Project

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Testimonio de Alejandro Grajales – Comité de Inmigración

Buenas tardes. Mi nombre es **Alejandro Grajales**, soy **deliverista** y organizador del **Proyecto de Justicia Laboral** y responsable del área de **robo de salario y abusos laborales**.

Hoy hemos escuchado los testimonios de tres trabajadores inmigrantes que compartieron con valentía lo que han vivido: jornadas extremas, amenazas, robo de salarios, enfermedades, y miedo. Pero también escuchamos algo más: que **gracias al apoyo del Proyecto de Justicia Laboral**, hoy están de pie, organizados, y luchando por justicia.

Julisa pudo denunciar a un empleador abusivo y obtuvo la acción diferida igual que otros 100 trabajadores. Rodolfo está colaborando con el DOL por las represalias y a la espera de su certificación para la visa U o T. Y José, después de más de tres décadas en este país y haber sido afectado por el 9/11, finalmente cuenta con protección migratoria. **Ninguno de estos logros hubiera sido posible sin el acompañamiento y el trabajo incansable de nuestra organización.**

Yo no hablo solo como organizador. También soy trabajador. Sé lo que es trabajar bajo la lluvia, frío o con miedo a un robo, accidente, a una desconexión injusta o a no llegar a casa. Y por eso estoy aquí porque sabemos que **esta lucha es colectiva, y va más allá de nosotros mismos.**

Por eso hoy les pido con urgencia: aseguren el financiamiento necesario para que el **Proyecto de Justicia Laboral** pueda seguir funcionando y creciendo. Necesitamos su respaldo para mantener estos cuatro programas fundamentales:

- Programa de Educación y Entrenamiento en Seguridad para Deliveristas – \$100,000
- Apoyo para Trabajadores de Bajos Ingresos – \$250,000
- Iniciativa para el Desarrollo de Cooperativas de Trabajadores – \$95,000
- Iniciativa de Apoyo para Trabajadoras e Inmigrantes – \$150,000

Sin estos recursos, no podremos seguir acompañando a los trabajadores más vulnerables de nuestra ciudad.

Hoy enfrentamos retos enormes: abuso laboral, racismo, violencia y desinformación. **Y es precisamente en momentos como este que más necesitamos su apoyo.**

Porque cuando una trabajador recupera su salario, o un deliverista aprende que tiene derechos, no solo gana una persona: gana toda la ciudad.

Muchas gracias.



Testimony of Alejandro Grajales – Immigration Committee

Good afternoon. My name is Alejandro Grajales. I'm a delivery worker and an organizer with the *Worker's Justice Project*, where I lead the work on wage theft and labor abuses.

Today, we heard the testimonies of three immigrant workers who bravely shared their experiences: extreme work hours, threats, stolen wages, illness, and fear. But we also heard something else: thanks to the support of the *Worker's Justice Project*, they are now standing tall, organized, and fighting for justice.

Julisa was able to report an abusive employer and received deferred action, just like over 100 other workers. Rodolfo is working with the Department of Labor on a retaliation case and is waiting for certification for a U or T visa. And José, after more than three decades in this country and being affected by 9/11, finally has immigration protection. None of these achievements would have been possible without the relentless support and work of our organization.

I speak not only as an organizer. I'm also a worker. I know what it's like to work in the rain, the cold, or under fear—fear of being robbed, getting into an accident, being unfairly deactivated, or not making it home. That's why I'm here—because we know this fight is collective, and it goes beyond ourselves.

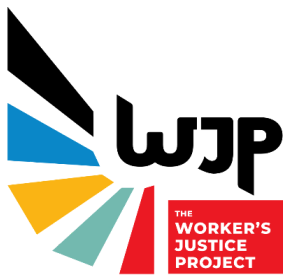
That's why I urgently ask you today: secure the necessary funding for the *Worker's Justice Project* to continue operating and growing. We need your support to sustain these four essential programs:

- Safety Education and Training Program for Delivery Workers – \$100,000
- Support for Low-Income Workers – \$250,000
- Worker Cooperative Development Initiative – \$95,000
- Support Initiative for Women and Immigrant Workers – \$150,000

Without these resources, we won't be able to continue supporting the most vulnerable workers in our city.

Today, we face enormous challenges: labor abuse, racism, violence, and misinformation. And it is precisely in times like these that we most need your support.

Because when a worker recovers stolen wages or a delivery worker learns they have rights, it's not just one person who wins—it's the whole city. Thank you very much.



TESTIMONY
of
WORKER'S JUSTICE PROJECT (WJP)
Proyecto Justicia Laboral

Presented to:
New York City Council Committee on Immigration
Hon. Alexa Aviles, Chair of the Immigration Committee
May 27, 2025

Prepared By:

Armary Perez

Members of Worker's Justice Project

Worker's Justice Project (WJP)
365 Broadway Brooklyn NY 11211 * 132 32nd St. Ofc 101 Brooklyn NY 11232



Good afternoon, Chair Aviles and members of the Committee. My name is Armary Perez, and I'm a Program Director at Workers Justice Project. I'm honored to speak today on behalf of WJP members who are delivery workers, day laborers, and domestic workers—people whose hard work keeps this city alive every single day.

I've seen firsthand the struggles our members face: stolen wages, unsafe jobs, and now, something even more frightening—they're being criminalized by the NYPD just for doing their jobs. These essential workers risk their health and safety to keep New Yorkers fed and cared for. But instead of protection, they live in daily fear—fear of immigration raids at court, at work, even in their own neighborhoods. This fear is real, and it tears families apart.

At Workers Justice Project, we stand alongside our members. We help them secure fair wages, safe working conditions, and dignity. We work with city agencies to provide the services they desperately need. But now, under the new NYPD and NYC Mayor Adams' policy, delivery workers are being targeted with criminal summonses—thrown into a confusing criminal system with little to no support. It's heartbreaking to witness.

For five years, we have received no new funding, even as demand grows. We've stretched every dollar to the limit, doing everything we can to support newly arrived immigrants and delivery workers. But the needs are overwhelming, and without new resources, we cannot protect these communities.

Today, I ask you to stand with us. Support these vital programs that mean the world to our members:

- \$200,000 for Protect NYC Immigrant Families—helping immigrant workers fight back against enforcement threats.
- \$100,000 for citywide Deliverista outreach and safety training—giving workers the tools and knowledge to defend themselves.



- \$4.970 million for the Day Laborer Workforce Initiative, a coalition of day laborer centers connecting workers to living-wage jobs and training.
- \$150,000 for OSHA-30 Construction Safety Training—ensuring immigrant workers can work safely.
- \$10,000 in discretionary funding—supporting everything from job training to healthcare access.

These dollars represent more than programs—they represent hope, dignity, and the chance for a better life for thousands of workers who make this city run. Together, we can build a New York that values and protects all its workers. Thank you for listening and for your support.



TESTIMONY
of
WORKER'S JUSTICE PROJECT (WJP)
Proyecto Justicia Laboral

Presented to:
New York City Council Committee on Immigration
Hon. Alexa Aviles, Chair of the Immigration Committee
Mayo 27, 2025

Prepared By:

José Quebrado

Members of Worker's Justice Project

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Testimony of José Quebrado – Immigration Committee

Good morning to all the members of the Immigration Committee and everyone present.

My name is José Quebrado, I am Mexican, and I have lived in the United States for over 34 years. I have spent my entire life working in this city, in restaurants and doing food deliveries. For more than 20 years, I worked at a bakery in Manhattan, with shifts over 12 hours a day, often with no days off, doing everything—from cleaning bathrooms and basements to preparing ingredients and operating ovens. I was never paid overtime, my rights were never respected, and I wasn't even paid the minimum wage.

Over five years ago, I filed a complaint with the Department of Labor. I'm still waiting for a response. But thanks to the Worker's Justice Project, I was able to apply for the Deferred Action program for workers, and today I have temporary protection and a Social Security number. It's a relief, yes—but the fight is far from over.

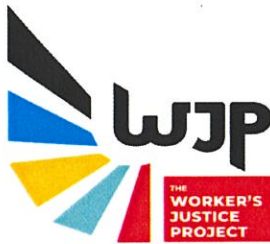
I am also one of the many people affected by the September 11 attacks. Since then, I've suffered from severe respiratory problems and mental health issues. I've been hospitalized multiple times, and I use a breathing device. Even so, I was told I don't qualify for compensation because I don't have cancer, even though my health has clearly deteriorated since that day.

I'm here today to say that workers like me also deserve justice and real access to resources. Organizations like the Worker's Justice Project are essential because they stand by us when no one else does. They help us raise our voices, defend our rights, and remind us that we are not alone.

I urge you to ensure the necessary funding so that this organization can continue supporting thousands of immigrant workers like me. We are not asking for charity. We are asking for justice.

Thank you for listening. And thank you for believing in a future where we can all live and work with dignity.

Thank you very much.



Testimonio de José Quebrado – Comité de Inmigración

Buenos días a todos los miembros del Comité de Inmigración y a los presentes.

Mi nombre es José Quebrado, soy mexicano y he vivido en Estados Unidos por más de 34 años. Toda mi vida he trabajado en esta ciudad, en restaurantes y haciendo entregas. Por más de 20 años, trabajé en una panadería en Manhattan, jornadas de más de 12 horas al día, sin descanso, haciendo de todo: desde limpiar baños y sótanos hasta preparar ingredientes, operar hornos, y más. Nunca me pagaron horas extras, ni respetaron mis derechos. Ni siquiera me pagaban el salario mínimo.

Hace más de cinco años presenté una denuncia al Departamento de labor. Aún sigo esperando respuesta. Pero gracias al Proyecto de Justicia Laboral, pude aplicar al programa de Acción Diferida para trabajadores, y hoy tengo protección temporal y un número de seguro social. Es un alivio, sí, pero la lucha no ha terminado.

Además, soy una de las muchas personas afectadas por los ataques del 11 de septiembre. Desde entonces, sufro de problemas respiratorios graves y de salud mental. He estado internado en varios hospitales y uso un aparato para poder respirar. A pesar de todo esto, me dijeron que no califico para compensación porque no tengo cáncer, aunque mi salud se deterioró desde aquel día.

Hoy estoy aquí para decirles que los trabajadores como yo también merecemos justicia y acceso a recursos reales. Que organizaciones como el Proyecto de Justicia Laboral son esenciales, porque nos acompañan cuando nadie más lo hace. Nos ayudan a levantar la voz, a defender nuestros derechos, y a no sentirnos solos.

Les pido que garanticen el apoyo económico necesario para que esta organización siga acompañando a miles de trabajadores inmigrantes como yo. No pedimos caridad. Pedimos justicia.

Gracias por escucharme. Y gracias por creer en un futuro donde todos podamos vivir y trabajar con dignidad.

Muchas gracias.



TESTIMONY
of
WORKER'S JUSTICE PROJECT (WJP)
Proyecto Justicia Laboral

Presented to:
New York City Council Committee on Immigration
Hon. Alexa Aviles, Chair of the Immigration Committee
Mayo 27, 2025

Prepared By:

Rodolfo Parada

Members of Worker's Justice Project

Worker's Justice Project (WJP)

365 Broadway Brooklyn NY 11211 * 132 32nd St. Ofc 101 Brooklyn NY 11232



Testimony of Rodolfo Parada – Immigration Committee

Good afternoon, Councilmember Alexa Avilés and all members of this Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

My name is Rodolfo Parada, I'm from Colombia, and I am a proud member of the Worker's Justice Project. I came to this country two years ago hoping to find stability, opportunities, and a dignified life for my family. But instead, I encountered a reality of exploitation and abuse.

I worked for a company called Dynamo Construction, where I suffered discrimination, insults, and humiliation for being Latino. We were called "dogs" and "lazy," and they even said they wished all Latinos were deported. We were denied water, had no time to eat, and worked long hours without being paid overtime. And worst of all, I was never paid what I was owed.

When I filed a wage theft complaint with the New York State Department of Labor, the employer began to harass me—calling me repeatedly to pressure me to drop the case, threatening me through my son, and even sending my personal information to ICE, requesting my deportation. I filed a police report, and I have evidence of everything.

Thanks to the Worker's Justice Project, I did not face this alone. They helped me get organized, speak out, and reclaim my voice. Today, thanks to their support, the Department of Labor is considering certifying my case for a U visa. That is not a favor—it is a right earned through struggle and organization.

That's why I'm here today: to ask you to allocate funding in the budget so that the Worker's Justice Project can continue to exist and help more people like me. Every time a worker is threatened with immigration, that organization stands firm—supporting and defending us.

Without them, we are alone. With them, we have power.

Thank you for listening to our stories and for considering our call for justice and funding.

Thank you.



Discurso de Rodolfo Parada – Comité de Inmigración

Buenas tardes, Concejal Alexa Avilés y a todos los miembros de este Comité. Gracias por la oportunidad de testificar.

Mi nombre es Rodolfo Parada, vengo de Colombia y soy miembro orgulloso del Proyecto de Justicia Laboral. Llegué a este país hace dos años con la esperanza de encontrar estabilidad, oportunidades y una vida digna para mi familia. Pero en vez de eso, me encontré con una realidad de explotación y abuso.

Trabajé en una empresa llamada Dynamo Construction, donde sufrí discriminación, insultos y humillaciones por ser latino. Nos llamaban “perros” y “flojos” y hasta dijeron que ojalá deportaran a todos los latinos. Nos negaban agua, no teníamos tiempo para comer, y trabajábamos jornadas largas sin pago de horas extras. Y lo más grave: nunca me pagaron lo que me correspondía.

Cuando denuncié el robo de salario ante el Departamento de Trabajo del Estado, el patrón comenzó a acosarme, me llamó insistentemente para presionarme de quitar la queja, me amenazó a través de mi hijo y hasta mandó mis datos a ICE pidiendo que me deportaran. Hice una denuncia ante la policía y tengo pruebas de todo.

Gracias al Proyecto de Justicia Laboral, no enfrenté esto solo. Me ayudaron a organizarme, denunciar y recuperar mi voz. Hoy, gracias a su apoyo, el Departamento de Trabajo está considerando certificar mi caso para la visa U. Eso no es un favor: es un derecho ganado con lucha y organización.

Por eso estoy aquí hoy: para pedirles que aseguren fondos en el presupuesto para que el Proyecto de Justicia Laboral pueda seguir existiendo y ayudando a más personas como yo. Cada vez que un trabajador es amenazado con migración, esa organización está ahí, firme, acompañando y defendiendo.

Sin ellos, estamos solos. Con ellos, tenemos poder.

Gracias por escuchar nuestras historias y por considerar nuestro llamado a la justicia y al financiamiento.

Gracias.

Testimony to the City Council Committee on Criminal Justice
May 27th, 2025

Submitted by Justyna Rzewinski, LCSW, PhD (c)

Thank you so much for allowing me to provide this written testimony. My name is Justyna Rzewinski. I'm a licensed clinical social worker and a PhD candidate. I am also an adjunct professor at Yeshiva University, Long Island University, and John Jay College of Criminal Justice. From December 2023 to September 2024, I worked on Rikers Island. Despite everything I had read, nothing prepared me for what I witnessed. I have read about Rikers and watched all the documentaries. I was told that I would be working on the mental health units. These units are different from any other unit on Rikers because these are the mental health units where people with severe mental illness receive the care they need. Oh, was I in for a surprise! I saw a widespread, undocumented practice called "deadlocking," where people with severe mental illness were locked in their cells for weeks, even months, without medication, showers, telephone use, and most importantly, sunshine and human contact. Their fundamental human rights were violated, rights that all human beings, no matter what they have done, deserve, and yet my patients on the mental health units, who were not yet convicted, were denied these rights.

This happened in the MO units, even in the PACE units, supposedly the highest level of mental health care on Rikers. Patients decompensated quickly, sitting in filth, smearing feces, surrounded by maggots and flies. The water was shut off. Basic sanitation is denied. This is how they woke up, slept, and ate three meals daily. Please, just for a moment, imagine yourself living in a tiny cell like that, smeared with feces and flies, and this is how you go to sleep and wake up each day. I have never witnessed anyone living in those types of conditions in my entire life. I ride the NYC train each day and have seen many things, but never have I witnessed people living like I witnessed my patients living in those cells. They were punished for looking at an officer inappropriately or responding angrily. Knowing precisely what the patient did was challenging because this was never documented. The officers knew they could not report this because it was illegal and inhumane, so they placed a white tag on the control panel next to the cell number to identify who was locked in. Therefore, whoever else came on tour would know not to let the individual out, not even knowing why they were locked in. I can only imagine how long this practice has been happening. When I started working there, it was clear that it had been a practice for many years; the officers did not try to hide this practice, and everyone knew what the white tag meant. The most vulnerable, those with cognitive or developmental disabilities, suffered the most. One of my patients had been locked in for so long that he didn't know how to use a phone.

This is how our city treats its most vulnerable, those living with mental illnesses they did not choose and could not prevent. The systemic racism implanted in the criminal justice system becomes glaringly evident the moment you set foot on Rikers Island. Many of these individuals have cycled through foster care, grown up in unstable or broken homes, and were never given a fair chance. Society failed them long before they encountered the justice system. And yet,

instead of offering support, we further punish them by confining them to Rikers, where they are subjected to inhumane conditions and stripped of their fundamental rights. This is not justice; it is the consequence of our collective failure.

As a society, we have a responsibility to do what is right. This includes closing Rikers and providing resources in the community where individuals can thrive and have a real chance of life. The proposed budget allocations are not just numbers but a significant step towards a more humane and just system. The City Council's commitment to these investments in our city's mental health infrastructure can bring about a tangible, positive change.

Supportive Housing: Add \$26.6M to expand Justice Involved Supportive Housing (JISH) to 500 units, per the Close Rikers agreement, and reissue the RFP with adequate service funding.

Intensive Mobile Treatment (IMT): Allocate \$24.7M to add 15 IMT teams and pilot step-down models. Current funding (\$5.3M) is insufficient to meet a waitlist of over 400 people.

Forensic ACT Teams: Invest \$7M to expand FACT teams and pilot ACT step-down teams to reduce the average wait time to 6–12 months.

Crisis Respite Centers: Allocate \$6M to open four new centers in compliance with Local Law 118-2023.

Residential Treatment Beds: Invest \$6.3M to add 250 beds for individuals with serious mental illness and co-occurring substance use.

Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) & Reentry Services: Increase funding by \$2.4M to expand ATI and reentry programs citywide.

Board of Corrections (BOC): Set BOC's budget at 1% of DOC's, adding \$8.1M to increase oversight capacity from 33 to ~100 staff.

These investments could easily be paid for simply by eliminating DOC's Uniformed Vacancies. Cutting 1,152 Vacant positions would save \$149.6M/year and align staffing with shrinking the jail population.

Reduce Overtime: Consolidate operations and begin closing jails, starting with the unused Anna M. Kross Center, where 109 officers remain assigned.

Leaving my patients behind in such horrific conditions was one of the most challenging decisions I've ever had to make. Not a day goes by that I don't think about them and the suffering they continue to endure. I've learned that these inhumane practices are still taking place—and, disturbingly, that officers no longer even attempt to conceal them. This cannot continue.

I resigned with a promise to myself, not just as a mental health clinician but as a human being, that I will never stop fighting until every person who is detained or incarcerated receives the care, support, respect, and dignity that every human being deserves.

With gratitude,

Justyna Rzewinski

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: 5/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ZACHARY KATZWELSON

Address: 121 6TH AVE NY, NY 10013

I represent: INDEPENDENT RIKERI COMMUNITY

Address: REE DOC BUDGET

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: NILBIA COYOTE

Address: _____

I represent: NICE

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kayt [REDACTED] Tiskus

Address: [REDACTED] NY NY 10032

I represent: collective Public Affairs

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jennifer J Parish

Address: 40 Bedford St., NY, NY 10026

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ernie Collette

Address: _____

I represent: Mobilization For Justice (Legal Services)

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: May 27, 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: YANKI TSHERING

Address: _____

I represent: ACCOMPANY CAPITAL

Address: 11 Broadway, Suite 1515

NY, NY 10004

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: May 27 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Armany Perez

Address: _____

I represent: W.J.P. Workers Justice Project

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 05/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jose Angel Quebrado

Address: _____

I represent: Workers Justice Project

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 05/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Julisa Ines Moracho

Address: _____

I represent: Workers Justice Project

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 05/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alejandro Grgales

Address: _____

I represent: Workers Justice Project

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: madeleine Bravo

Address: STATEN ISLAND, NY

I represent: LA COMMUNA

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Natalia Anisizabel

Address: _____

I represent: Make the Road NY

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 05/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Julian Calin

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: Center for Family Life in Sunset Park

Address: 443 39th Street, 4th floor, Brooklyn, NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Shirley SHERMAN

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: Center for Family Life in Sunset Park

Address: 443 39th St Brooklyn

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SARAH NOLAN

Address: 252 W 39th St.

I represent: Kids in Need of Defense / ICARE coalition

Address: I would like to testify with ICARE coalition (Sierra Kraft)

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

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deborah Lee (or ~~Shavane Kaufman~~ after 3:30)

Address: The Legal Aid Society, 49 Thomas St

I represent: _____

Address: A.

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5-27-2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Robert Agiemang

Address: [REDACTED] NY, NY 10001

I represent: NYIC

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Catherine Gonzalez

Address: 177 Livingston St, 7th Fl, Brooklyn, NY

I represent: Brooklyn Defender Services

Address: NYIFUP Pan Am

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kavla Ostolaza

Address: 360 East 161 Street Bronx, NY

I represent: Bronx Defenders /

Address: NYIFUP Panel

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Craig Day

Address: _____

I represent: The Don's Legal Services Center - ICARE

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sierra Kraft

Address: _____

I represent: ICARE Coalition

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: PAULA INHARGUE

Address: _____

I represent: UNITED NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSES

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JIMENG WULI

Address: _____

I represent: Chinese-American Planning Council

Address: 45 Suffolk Street

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: _____

Address: Rawl Rivers

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aracelis Lucero

Address: [REDACTED] Bx NY 10473

I represent: Masa

Address: 2770 Third Ave 11 Bx NY 10455

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Riva Shang

Address: _____

I represent: Asian American Federation

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Exec Budget ☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Cathy Cohen

Address: _____

I represent: Wk Adm-Vidua Project

Address: 16 N. St. 41 3, New York, NY 10038

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lorena Lucero, DC of Pagnis: Pkey

Address: _____

I represent: MOJA

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Commissioner Castro

Address: _____

I represent: MOJA

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jasmya Sanchez, DC of Administration and

Address: Strategic Initiatives

I represent: MOJA

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 05/27/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: NATALY ARDILA

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn, NY

I represent: Rodolfo Parada

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MICHELE SENCION

Address: _____

I represent: SAFE PASSAGE PROJECT

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kenann Pauls

Address: _____

I represent: Take Root Justice/Legal Services

Address: for the working poor- legal services panel

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Wade Ziesemer (NYLAG)

Address: _____

I represent: NYLAG - legal services panel

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Luis Mancheno

Address: _____

I represent: Legal Services NYC - legal services panel

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deborah Lee

Address: _____

I represent: Legal Aid Society - legal services panel

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/22/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sophie Dalsimer

Address: _____

I represent: NY Lawyers for the Public Interest

Address: - legal services panel

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Megan French-Marcelin

Address: 1428 Park Pl

I represent: ATI coalition

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mamadou Cella Balde

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jose Yos

Address: _____

I represent: Worker's Justice Project

Address: 365 Broadway, Brooklyn

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LUIS Cortes

Address: _____

I represent: Worker's Justice Project

Address: 365 Broadway, Brooklyn

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RICHARD WILLIAM FLORES

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Scarlett Thompson

Address: 11 Park Place

I represent: NYC Alliance Against Sexual Assault

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Andrea Rodriguez

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____


(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jasmine Joseph

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Roberto Ponce

Address: _____

I represent: Hot Bread Kitchen

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Francis Torres

Address: 75-20 Astoria Blvd

I represent: DOC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: FRITZ FRAGE

Address: 75-20 ASTORIA BLVD

I represent: DOC

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SHERRILLAN BARKER

Address: 95-20 ASTORIA BLVD

I represent: DOC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JAMES CONROY

Address: 95-20 ASTORIA BLVD

I represent: DOC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JAMES BOYD

Address: 95-20 ASTORIA BLVD

I represent: DOC

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Faizan Fubair

Address: 75-20 Astoria Blvd

I represent: DOC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Neil McCarty

Address: 75-20 Astoria Blvd

I represent: DOC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kevin Donerty

Address: 75-20 Astoria Blvd

I represent: DOC

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JAMES SAMMALKS

Address: 45-20 Astoria Blvd

I represent: DOC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alex Maldonado

Address: 45-20 Astoria Blvd

I represent: DOC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Margaret Martin

Address: Catholic Charities

I represent: _____

Address: 20 Maiden Lane, NY, NY

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

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THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Carmendeleon

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: President Local 768 DC 37

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/27/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jennifer Parish

Address: 40 Rector St, NY, NY

I represent: _____

Address: _____

THE COUNCIL THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/29/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lauren Migliaccio

Address: 17 Battery Pl #331 NY NY 10004

I represent: Immigrant Justice Corps

Address: same

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Riva Shang

Address: _____

I represent: AAF / Language Justice

Address: "Immigration Cntr"

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aracelis Lucero

Address: _____

I represent: MASA / Language Justice

Address: Immigration Cntr.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Airenakhue Omoragbon

Address: _____

I represent: African Communities Together /

Address: Language Justice

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Harold Dasque

Address: _____

I represent: HAUP / Language Justice

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Robert Agyemang

Address: _____

I represent: NYIC / Language Justice

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Monique Francis

Address: 555 W. 57th STREET, NY, NY 10019

I represent: CUNY Citizenship Now!

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sarita Daftary

Address: 40 Rector St 19th fl

I represent: Freedom Agenda

Address: 40 Rector St

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