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COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH THE
COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY
WITH THE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING
AND BUILDINGS

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April 13, 2021
Start: 10:19 a.m.
Recess: 1:17 p.m.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING (VIRTUAL ROOM 1)

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

Robert E. Cornegy,
Chairperson for Committee on
Housing and Buildings

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

- Selvena N. Brooks-Powers
- Margaret S. Chin
- Daniel Dromm
- Mathieu Eugene
- Francisco P. Moya
- Robert E. Cornegy, Jr.
- Carlina Rivera
- Farah N. Louis
- Fernando Cabrera
- Barry S. Grodenchik
- Mark Gjonaj
- Helen K. Rosenthal
- Bill Perkins

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2 COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS

2

3 A P P E A R A N C E S

4 Fabian Bravo
5 Neighbors Helping Neighbors

6 Mario Cortez

7 Raul Zambrano
8 Interpreter

9 Jean Bae
10 MOIA Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs

11 Sabrina Fong
12 MOIA Deputy Director of Research

13 Ahmed Tigani
14 HPD Deputy Commissioner of Neighborhood
15 Strategies

16 Anne-Marie Hendrickson
17 HPD Deputy Commissioner of Asset & Property
18 Management

19 Trisha Sobha
20 Staff Attorney at Mobilization for Justice

21 Sheena Kang
22 Senior Policy Analyst at Citizens Housing and
23 Planning Council, CHPC

24 Yamilka Mena
25 Director of Immigration Initiatives at the
Hispanic Federation

Leslie Ann Caraballo
Practicing Law Graduate with the Civil Housing
Practice at Legal Aid Society

Alexandra Dougherty
Senior Staff Attorney and Policy Counsel of the
Civil Justice Practice for Brooklyn Defender
Services

Alma Arias
Outreach and Benefits Coordinator at Translatinx
Network

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COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH THE
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3

A P P E A R A N C E S

Aura Mejia
Advocate and Organizer at Neighbors Helping
Neighbors in Sunset Park Brooklyn

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2 SERGEANT LUGO: PC recording good.

3 SERGEANT KOTOWSKI: Cloud recording started.

4 SERGEANT PEREZ: Backup is rolling.

5 SERGEANT KOTOWSKI: Sergeant Bradley, can you
6 please give us the opening?

7 SERGEANT BRADLEY: Good morning and welcome to
8 today's New York City Council Hearing on Immigration
9 joint with Housing and Buildings. At this time, will
10 all panelists please turn on your videos.

11 To minimize disruption, please place electronic
12 devices on vibrate or on silent. If you wish to
13 submit a testimony, you may do so at
14 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Again, that is
15 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Thank you for your
16 cooperation. Chairs we may begin.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Sergeant at Arms
18 and Buenos Dias to everyone. I am Carlos Manchaca,
19 Chair of the New York City Council's Committee on
20 Immigration. We are joined today by Committee on
21 Housing and Buildings Chaired by my colleague Council
22 Member Robert Cornegy and I would like to also let
23 you all know that we are joined by Council Member
24 Dromm, who is leading the Resolution today that we
25

3 are hearing. Council Member Chin, Gjonaj, Louis,
4 Brooks-Powers, Grodenchik and Moya.

5 Today, the Committees will be conducting
6 oversight on the Housing Disparities Faced by
7 Immigrant New Yorkers and the programs and services
8 and outreach conducted to address these gaps. The
9 Committee on Immigration will also hear a Resolution,
10 Preconsidered Resolution sponsored by Council Member
11 Dromm, which calls on the New York State Legislature
12 to pass and the Governor to sign legislation that
13 would expand the eligibility for disability rent
14 increase exemption to include certain categories of
15 immigrant New Yorkers who are currently excluded

16 I will let Council Member Dromm make a statement
17 after we hear from Cornegy, Chair Cornegy but let me
18 just say that the city's rent freeze program is a
19 critical lifeline for low-income New Yorkers,
20 vulnerable New Yorkers. It helps them stay in their
21 homes. It keeps families together. There is no
22 reason that proof of disability needs to rely on the
23 receipt of federally funded benefits that are
24 restricted to U.S. Citizens and certain immigration
25 categories. We need the state legislation so that
the Rent Freeze Program can truly be for all New

3 Yorkers over the age of 62 or living with
4 disabilities.

5 I want to thank my colleague Council Member Dromm
6 for being a member of this Committee, for being a
7 past Chair of this Committee and for being the
8 current Chair of the Finance Committee, for all the
9 leadership on this issue. We need this state action
10 now.

11 Housing disparities such as overcrowding, rent
12 burdened and poor housing conditions are an ever
13 present reality for many immigrant New Yorkers. Of
14 the three million immigrant New Yorkers in our city,
15 one in five live in overcrowded households and more
16 than half are considered rent burdened as more than
17 30 percent of their monthly income is spent on rent.
18 16 percent live in apartments considered to have poor
19 conditions due to landlord neglect.

20 The last federal administration attempted to
21 issue various policies targeting immigrants through
22 rule making, such as the HUD Proposed Rule and the
23 Public Charge Rule, which could have reduced
24 utilization of housing assistance programs like
25 Section 8 and Public Housing, further causing
increases in unstable housing, overcrowding, shelter

3 use and ultimately increasing rates of homelessness.
4 Immigration enforcement also increased during the
5 Trump Administration tearing families apart.

6 With the removal of the breadwinner, once self-
7 sufficient families were often devastated and forced
8 to rely on social welfare programs to survive, in
9 addition to facing trauma of a vanished parent. This
10 often left families unable to afford rent or with the
11 loss of their house subsidy. On top of all of this,
12 immigrants have continued to face tenant harassment
13 and discrimination by landlords and this has
14 unfortunately gotten worse during the COVID-19
15 pandemic.

16 As the pandemic has caused hundreds of thousands
17 of New Yorkers to lose their jobs. Undocumented
18 individuals across the city are even more vulnerable
19 as they are not eligible for any kind of government
20 assistance. Federal stimulus checks or unemployment
21 insurance are often left even more vulnerable to be
22 harassed by landlords. Similarly, many of the
23 housing programs available to New Yorkers fall under
24 federal regulations that restrict access based on
25 immigration status.

3 As we are coming out from under a gruel and
4 xenophobic White House, we have seen firsthand the
5 power of organization with the recently passed New
6 York State budget that includes a historic excluded
7 workers fund. We cannot stop here and we must
8 continue to work to push all levels of government to
9 propose new guidance, new rules and new legislation
10 that formerly ensures that immigrants have equal
11 access to affordable housing.

12 Thank you to the members of the Administration
13 who are here. I will note that I believe the, yes,
14 the Commissioner of MOYA, the Mayor's Office of
15 Immigrant Affairs is not here. I am always
16 disappointed not to have her here. That's why we
17 have Commissioners and I don't believe that the HPD
18 Commissioner will be here but we are joined by the
19 Deputy Commissioner to answer questions. And so, we
20 are here to hear testimony of existing programs and
21 their impact with our first panel and all the
22 resources that are available, we are going to talk
23 about that today.

24 So, I hope we can chart a course together to
25 address these disparities and thank you to the
service providers who work tirelessly and creatively

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3 to house immigrant New Yorkers. Thank you to the
4 staff for running this remote hearing behind the
5 scenes including that closed caption program. Thank
6 you so much for making that happen today. Thank you
7 for the staff on working on the Committee Staff. My
8 Committee Counsel Harbani Ahuja, Policy Analyst
9 Elizabeth Kronk and my staff as well on the District
10 Chief of Staff Lorena Lucero, Deputy Chief of Staff
11 Cesar Vargas and Legislative and Communications
12 Director Tony Chiarito.

13 And with that, I want to turn it over to Council
14 Member Cornegy, Chair of the Housing Committee for
15 his open statement. And while you get unmuted, we
16 are also joined by Council Member Rivera and Council
17 Member Rosenthal, welcome.

18 CHAIRPERSON CORNEGY: Thank you Chair Menchaca.
19 Good morning everyone. I am Council Member Robert
20 Cornegy, Chair of the Committee on Housing and
21 Buildings. Thank you all for joining this joint
22 hearing with the Committee on Immigration, Chaired by
23 my colleague Council Member Carlos Menchaca.

24 I would like to thank my Co-Chair for hosting
25 this very important hearing with me, especially as
timely as it is. The cost of housing in New York

3 City continues to rise affecting all demographics
4 with low and moderate income. However, the rising
5 cost of living disproportionately affects immigrants
6 and people of color. On average, immigrant New
7 Yorkers are more likely to be rent burdened and live
8 in overcrowded households compared to their U.S. born
9 counterparts.

10 In 2011, it was found that 16 percent of low-
11 income immigrant New Yorkers lived in apartments
12 considered to be in poor condition. Over 3 million
13 immigrants call New York City home. We should be
14 doing all that we can to ensure that they have a fair
15 chance to live here in dignity, with safe, decent
16 affordable housing as a critical part of that.

17 Although there are a number of housing programs and
18 resources to assist immigrants at the state and city
19 level, there are still disparities in who can fully
20 access them.

21 New Americans who have not achieved immigration
22 documentation on the basis of their immigration
23 status alone have limited access to some of these
24 programs. For a group that is already
25 disproportionately living in overcrowded substandard
housing, the problem is exacerbated by the fact that

3 they don't have an equal share in public programs and
4 resources. Nobody should have to live in substandard
5 housing, let alone because of their immigrant status.

6 Today, I am committed to learn what the city can
7 be doing better to serve some of the most vulnerable
8 members of our population. The Committee's will also
9 hear a Resolution, as already stated by my colleague,
10 sponsored by Council Member Dromm. We very much
11 appreciate putting forward this resolution that would
12 expand eligibility for disability rent increase
13 exemption to include New Yorkers who are currently
14 excluded because of their immigration status. Our
15 city programs and laws cannot treat one person as
16 more of a human than another person. Our laws are
17 meaningless and they only apply most of the time.
18 Nobody is safe until we are all safe.

19 I would like to thank my colleagues from the
20 Committee's on Housing and Buildings and Immigration
21 who are present. I will now turn this over to my
22 colleague Council Member Dromm, so that he can
23 introduce his Resolution this morning. Thank you.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Thank you very much Chairs
25 Menchaca and Chair Cornegy. I am really happy that
we are having this hearing today on this Resolution.

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3 Since I became a Council Member, my office has
4 been helping constituents apply for what is popularly
5 known as the Rent Freeze Program, which helps low-
6 income older and disabled New Yorkers stay in their
7 homes. In addition to meeting financial criteria,
8 recipients of the Senior Citizen Rent Increase
9 Exemption or SCRIE must be at least 62 years of age.
10 Recipients of the Disability Rent Increase Exemption
11 or DRIE, must show that they receive federal
12 benefits, mainly Social Security Disability Insurance
13 or Supplemental Security Income. These two benefits
14 SCRIE and DRIE, have been invaluable to many of the
15 residents of Jackson Heights and Elmhurst and every
16 neighborhood in this city.

17 Representing an incredibly immigrant rich
18 district and having Chaired the Committee on
19 Immigration my first term, I always try to remain
20 sensitive to the immigrant perspective. I bring this
21 lens to my work as Chair of the Committee on Finance,
22 overseeing the Department of Finance which
23 administers SCRIE and DRIE. Sadly, much government
24 assistance is denied to immigrants in need and DRIE
25 is no exception. Many disabled individuals in my
district and throughout the city are ineligible for

3 no other reason than their immigration status. They
4 do not qualify for the relevant federal programs and
5 therefore, do not qualify for DRIE. It is
6 fundamentally unfair that the vulnerable of the
7 vulnerable are prevented from accessing the very
8 programs that are supposed to be helping them. SCRIE
9 has been working to assist our seniors, regardless of
10 their immigration status and there is absolutely no
11 reason why DRIE should not be doing the same.

12 Since DRIE is a creation of state law, we have to
13 turn to Albany for a fix. Fortunately, Senator
14 Gustavo Rivera and Assembly Member Jessica Gonzalez
15 Rojas have stepped up honoring the process of
16 legislation to do just that. I want to thank Chair
17 Menchaca for holding this important hearing. I look
18 forward to the testimony of our advocates about the
19 special concerns that immigrants including disabled
20 faced with housing. DRIE is one of the best programs
21 out there aimed at preventing homelessness and
22 indigency but it will not live up to its great
23 promise unless all immigrants are included.

24 And let me just say in conclusion if I may, that
25 just last week, we had a terrible fire in my
district. Over 100 apartments were destroyed and

1
2 over 400 people were displaced by the fire. Almost
3 all of them were immigrants. Some documented and
4 many undocumented and of course, many do not get any
5 benefits at all because of their immigration status.
6 But I do want to thank HPD and the American Red Cross
7 for doing all that they can to help place these
8 residents in appropriate housing at least for the
9 short term in motels for right now and extending the
10 deadline that they can stay in the hotels and also
11 for the work that they are doing to place them in
12 housing as we move into the future. It's going to
13 take a long time for these folks to get settled again
14 and it's really important that we give them every
15 opportunity that they need to come back. Talk about
16 displacing communities, when fires happen like this,
17 communities get displaced and it is really important
18 that we keep those communities whole.

19 So, thank you again and I look forward to hearing
20 this hearing today, what people say in the hearing
21 today. Thank you Chairs.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member
23 Dromm. My name Harbani Ahuja and I am Counsel to the
24 Committee on Immigration at the New York City Council

3 and I am going to be going over some procedural
4 items.

5 Before we begin, I want to remind everyone that
6 you will be on mute until you are called on to
7 testify, when you will be unmuted by the host. I
8 will be calling on panelists to testify. Please
9 listen for your name to be called and I will be
10 periodically announcing who the next panelist will
11 be. For everyone testifying today, please know that
12 there maybe a few seconds of delay before you are
13 unmuted and we thank you in advance for your
14 patients.

15 All hearing participants should submit written
16 testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov. At today's
17 hearing, the first panel will consist of members of
18 the public, followed by representatives from the
19 Administration, followed by Council Member questions
20 and then additional members of the public will
21 testify. I would like to remind everyone that unlike
22 our typical Council hearings, we will be calling on
23 individuals one by one to testify. Each panelist
24 will be given three minutes to speak. For panelists,
25 once your name is called, a member of our staff will
unmute you and the Sergeant at Arms will give you the

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2 go ahead to begin upon setting the timer. Please
3 wait for the Sergeant to announce that you may begin
4 before delivering your testimony.

5 Council Members who have questions for a
6 particular panelists should use the raise hand
7 function in Zoom and I will call on you after the
8 panelist has completed their testimony. We will now
9 hear testimony from our first panel. I would like to
10 welcome Fabian Bravo to testify. After Fabian, I
11 will be calling on Mario Cortez to testify. Fabian
12 and Mario will be accompanied by Raul Zambrano who
13 will be providing Spanish interpretation. Can we
14 please unmute Raul?

15 RAUL ZAMBRANO: I am unmuted.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. You may give
17 instructions.

18 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Yes, yes.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will be hearing from
20 Fabian Bravo first.

21 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Okay, [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 15:58-
22 16:26]. Okay? Should he go ahead now?

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Yeah, that would be good.

24 RAUL ZAMBRANO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 16:33-
25 16:37].

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2 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 16:37].

3 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Good morning.

4 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 16:43-16:52].

5 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Thank you for allowing me to give
6 testimony before all of you.

7 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 17:02-17:10].

8 RAUL ZAMBRANO: My name is Fabian and I am a
9 member of the organization Neighbors Helping
10 Neighbors.

11 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 17:20-17:30]

12 RAUL ZAMBRANO: It has been a year since the
13 pandemic has affected the world and that is when the
14 nightmare begun. That nightmare [INAUDIBLE 17:43].

15 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 17:46-17:59].

16 RAUL ZAMBRANO: This nightmare is affecting our
17 Latin community in an emotional, mental and spiritual
18 way.

19 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 18:10-18:15].

20 RAUL ZAMBRANO: We were not prepared for a
21 pandemic of this magnitude.

22 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 18:21-18:26].

23 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Because of that -

24 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 18:27-18:30].

25

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2 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Because of that pandemic we are
3 living the negative aspects of that pandemic. We are
4 living in anxiety.

5 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 18:41-18:54].

6 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Thousands, thousands of us have
7 lost friends, family members and unfortunately we
8 were not able to say our goodbye. [SPEAKING IN
9 SPANISH 19:05-19:07].

10 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 19:08-19:14].

11 RAUL ZAMBRANO: In my case, my sister-in-law and
12 two friends died because of COVID-19.

13 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 19:25-19:30].

14 RAUL ZAMBRANO: The undocumented community has
15 been affected twice as much because of that
16 situation.

17 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 19:39-19:44].

18 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Other than that, this nightmare
19 is not over.

20 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 19:48-19:57].

21 RAUL ZAMBRANO: We are also losing our jobs in
22 cleaning, in construction, in restaurants, in taking
23 care of children.

24 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 20:09-20:20].

25 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Unfortunately -

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3 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 20:21-20:23].

4 RAUL ZAMBRANO: We do not receive any type of
5 financial assistance such as unemployment, since we
6 do not have a social security number.

7 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 20:38-20:42].

8 RAUL ZAMBRANO: All of that -

9 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 20:43-51].

10 RAUL ZAMBRANO: All of that is costing more
11 financial burdens. Those are expenses that have gone
12 up such as rent, food and others.

13 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 21:06-21:17].

14 RAUL ZAMBRANO: In a month is the day in which
15 evictions expire for the City of New York.

16 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 21:31-21:35].

17 RAUL ZAMBRANO: What is going to happen if
18 lawsuits start in Housing Court? How many people are
19 going to be left without a home?

20 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 21:52-22:00].

21 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Where are we going to go if we
22 are evicted from the apartments where we are
23 presently at with our family and our children?

24 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 22:15-
25 22:22].

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2 RAUL ZAMBRANO: In my case, the owner of the
3 house where I live has sued us four times already.

4 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 22:34-22:44].

5 RAUL ZAMBRANO: All of these lawsuits, we have
6 received help from organizations such as Neighbors
7 Helping Neighbors. [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 22:56-
8 23:01].

9 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 23:01:23:06].

10 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Urban – and Urban Justice Center,
11 I told you about 5th Avenue.

12 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 23:13-
13 23:20].

14 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Like in my case, hundreds of
15 people can lose their housing in Housing Court.

16 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 23:29-23:37].

17 RAUL ZAMBRANO: And we don't have the money for
18 the financial possibility to be able to pay for an
19 attorney.

20 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 23:47-23:58].

21 RAUL ZAMBRANO: And we count on organizations
22 such as something 5th Avenue and Neighbors Helping
23 Neighbors, so that they can help us in cases like
24 this.

25 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 24:13-24:18].

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2 RAUL ZAMBRANO: There are more organizations

3 [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 24:21-24:23].

4 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 24:24-24:25].

5 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Just to mention some of them
6 okay.

7 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 24:30-24:35].

8 RAUL ZAMBRANO: These organizations, at the same
9 time, they need funds.

10 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 24:41-24:50].

11 RAUL ZAMBRANO: So, that they can help the people
12 that need this at the present and are going to need
13 this after May.

14 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 25:00-25:08].

15 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Obviously there is a chaotic
16 situation coming up because of the lawsuits also.

17 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 25:19-25:26].

18 RAUL ZAMBRANO: If we anticipate ourselves, we
19 can prepare for this crisis coming up.

20 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 25:36-25:43].

21 RAUL ZAMBRANO: This crisis is coming up with the
22 evictions of homes and businesses here in Sunset
23 Park.

24 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 25:24-26:06].

25

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3 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Therefore, I ask you on behalf of
4 my Latin community that you send more funds to the
5 Latin community. That you destine more funds to the
6 Latin community.

7 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 26:25-26:33].

8 RAUL ZAMBRANO: And if possible, that you help
9 those organizations, so that those organizations help
10 us, the immigrants.

11 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 26:45-26:52].

12 RAUL ZAMBRANO: With projects like help from
13 attorney's, so that they can help us in family court.

14 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 27:04-27:15].

15 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Legal help with owners of
16 buildings who sometimes harass us, so that we are
17 evicted from the apartments.

18 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 27:27-
19 27:34].

20 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Just like this pandemic that does
21 not discriminate ages or societies.

22 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 27:45-27:53].

23 RAUL ZAMBRANO: These lawsuits regarding the
24 pandemic are also not going to discriminate race or
25 sex.

FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 28:06-28:13].

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3 RAUL ZAMBRANO: We have lost a lot with the
4 pandemic. We do not want to lose our homes.

5 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 28:21-28:26].

6 RAUL ZAMBRANO: You are our last hope in this
7 crisis in the most attentive way.

8 FABIAN BRAVO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 28:34-28:39].

9 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Thank you all for your attention
10 and that was my testimony.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Gracias Fabian. Muchas
12 gracias.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you very for your
14 testimony. We will now be moving on to Mario Cortez.

15 RAUL ZAMBRANO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 28:58-
16 29:05].

17 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 29:07-29:13].

18 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Good morning to all. I thank you
19 for giving me the space to give my testimony.

20 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 29:23-29:25].

21 RAUL ZAMBRANO: My name is Mario Cortez.

22 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 29:28-29:31].

23 RAUL ZAMBRANO: I live at 229 23rd Street in
24 Brooklyn.

25 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 29:38-29:45].

3 RAUL ZAMBRANO: I have been living in the same
4 apartment and in the same community for 12 years.
5 It's been since 1997.

6 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 29:57-30:00].

7 RAUL ZAMBRANO: The problems that I have in my
8 home are the following.

9 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 30:08-30:11]

10 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Lack of repairs, lack of heat.

11 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 30:17].

12 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Discrimination.

13 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 30:19-30:21].

14 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Harassment and eviction.

15 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 30:24-
16 30:28].

17 RAUL ZAMBRANO: The ones I have added are the
18 ones I have been suffering during the pandemic.

19 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 30:36-30:38].

20 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Physical, mental and economic
21 financial.

22 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 30:45-30:46].

23 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Depression, stress.

24 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 30:49:30:50].

25 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Anxiety, insomnia.

MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 30:54-30:57].

2 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Total loss of my job for a
3 lengthy period, no income.

4 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 31:05-31:12].

5 RAUL ZAMBRANO: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 31:12-
6 31:14].

7 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 31:16-31:22].

8 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Having a job without receiving
9 any benefit, even though I am paying my own personal
10 taxes.

11 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 31:31-31:38].

12 RAUL ZAMBRANO: I pay for the rent of a barber
13 chair that I rent without receiving any income.

14 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 31:51-31:55].

15 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Did not receive any kind of
16 stimulus payment from the government during this
17 pandemic.

18 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 32:04-32:12].

19 RAUL ZAMBRANO: And just like that, not having
20 any income that allows me to pay for the rent of the
21 apartment that is late.

22 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 32:26-32:32].

23 RAUL ZAMBRANO: I thank the organization
24 Neighbors Helping Neighbors for opening their doors
25 to me and giving me their support.

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2 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 32:44-32:45].

3 RAUL ZAMBRANO: When I asked them for it.

4 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 32:49-32:53].

5 RAUL ZAMBRANO: They have given me the adequate
6 advice regarding my problem with the eviction.

7 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 33:01-33:05].

8 RAUL ZAMBRANO: To the present, we are still
9 standing, fighting.

10 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 33:11:33:15].

11 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Letting me know of the rights
12 that I have as a tenant.

13 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 33:21-33:30].

14 RAUL ZAMBRANO: And giving me and 18 additional
15 families legal support to be able to face this
16 problem of the eviction.

17 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 33:47-33:50].

18 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Therefore I think it is necessary

19 -

20 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 33:54-33:59].

21 RAUL ZAMBRANO: If that organization keep
22 receiving funds, financial from the government.

23 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 34:07-34:09].

24 RAUL ZAMBRANO: To continue being current, up-to-
25 date.

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2 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 34:15-34:19].

3 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Helping more families in need
4 that were abused.

5 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 34:26-34:29].

6 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Being a minority and the most
7 vulnerable -

8 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 34:37-34:40].

9 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Since we are a community of
10 immigrants struggling.

11 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 34:46-34:51].

12 RAUL ZAMBRANO: For fighting for a job, for a
13 home and a family.

14 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 34:58-35:05].

15 RAUL ZAMBRANO: We must not forget that this
16 community has been largely impacted because of a
17 great need of first needs.

18 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 35:21-35:23].

19 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Mentioning some of them -

20 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 35:25].

21 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Health.

22 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 35:28-35:31].

23 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Lack of food, loss of work.

24 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 35:35-35:38].

25 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Few hours, lack of income.

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2 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 35:42-35:46].

3 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Purchasing medication, being
4 behind on the rent and utility payments.

5 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 35:57-36:00].

6 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Loss of a family member because
7 of the pandemic amongst many others.

8 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 36:10-36:13].

9 RAUL ZAMBRANO: I ask them for economic help.

10 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 36:20-36:24].

11 RAUL ZAMBRANO: I raise my voice for the
12 immigrant, for my immigrant community of the City of
13 New York.

14 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 36:34-36:36].

15 RAUL ZAMBRANO: So that we can be heard and taken
16 into account.

17 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 36:42-36:48].

18 RAUL ZAMBRANO: We do not wish to stay invisible
19 for the society and before the politicians and the
20 government.

21 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 37:00-37:03].

22 RAUL ZAMBRANO: In this city that many others
23 have abandoned.

24 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 37:09-37:12].

25

3 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Having the opportunity of going
4 back to the states where they came from, their states
5 of origin.

6 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 37:23-37:26].

7 RAUL ZAMBRANO: To avoid the payment of elevated
8 rents.

9 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 37:32-37:37].

10 RAUL ZAMBRANO: To avoid accumulated because of
11 the pandemic and lack of work.

12 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 37:45-37:47].

13 RAUL ZAMBRANO: It affects us all in general.

14 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 37:50-
15 37:57].

16 RAUL ZAMBRANO: In our case, a lot more since we
17 are a minority of immigrants in society.

18 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 38:08-38:11]

19 RAUL ZAMBRANO: And the voice of many of us that
20 continue living here.

21 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 38:18-38:21].

22 RAUL ZAMBRANO: With a great fear that the
23 moratorium ends on May 1st.

24 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 38:28-38:33].

25

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2 RAUL ZAMBRANO: We do not have the resources to
3 be able to resolve the problem with our – the
4 problems with our housing.

5 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 38:46-39:04].

6 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Lastly, I want to thank the
7 organization Neighbors Helping Neighbors, especially
8 Marcella, Kimberly and all who have helped us for the
9 last year and a half with the problems that we have
10 facing eviction.

11 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 39:31-39:34].

12 RAUL ZAMBRANO: Because it is possible that at
13 present, we would have been evicted already.

14 MARIO CORTEZ: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 39:43-39:46].

15 RAUL ZAMBRANO: That is it. Thank you for
16 listening to my testimony.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [SPEAKING IN SPANISH
18 39:52-39:58]. I want to say thank you to Fabian and
19 Mario for being here and for speaking their truth.

20 [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 40:06-15]. This is what we do
21 here in this Committee is to really hear from people
22 directly because you all have power in your voice.

23 [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 40:23-40:42]. I was just
24 telling Mr. Bravo that I know her daughter who has
25 been fighting on the ground and testifies as a young

1 person in middle school I think now and so, this is a
2 family, the Bravo family has been fighting for a long
3 time and it's just great that this hearing is going
4 to start with these voices representing not just a
5 Latino community but a community of immigrants who
6 are experiencing this and the agencies are here to
7 hear first-hand what is driving us as a City Council,
8 as a joint committee and as City Council as a whole.

9 So, [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 41:22-41:33]. And
10 hopefully we will bring that justice because of this
11 work that we are going to be doing in this Committee.

12 So, thank you so much and I will hand it back to
13 Committee Counsel.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. I would
15 like to thank this panel for their testimony and our
16 interpreter for providing interpretation.

17 At this time, we would like to move on to our
18 next panel, which will be members of the
19 Administration. Testimony will be provided by Jean
20 Bae MOIA Director of Policy and Legislative Affairs.
21 Additionally, the following representatives will be
22 available for answering questions. Sabrina Fong MOIA
23 Deputy Director of Research, Ahmed Tigani, HPD Deputy
24 Commissioner of Neighborhood Strategies and Anne-

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3 Marie Hendrickson HPD Deputy Commissioner of Asset &
4 Property Management.

5 As a reminder during the hearing, if Council
6 Members would like to ask a question of the
7 Administration or of a specific panelist, please use
8 the Zoom raise hand function and I will call on you
9 in order.

10 Before we begin, I will administer the oath.
11 Director Jean Bae, Deputy Director Sabrina Fong,
12 Deputy Commissioner Ahmed Tigani, Deputy Commissioner
13 Anne-Marie Hendrickson. I will call on you each
14 individually for a response. Please raise your right
15 hands.

16 Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth
17 and nothing but the truth in your testimony before
18 this Committee and to respond honestly to Council
19 Member questions. Director Jean Bae?

20 JEAN BAE: I do.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Deputy Director
22 Sabrina Fong?

23 SABRINA FONG: I do.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Deputy
25 Commissioner Ahmed Tigani?

AHMED TIGANI: I do.

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33

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Deputy
4 Commissioner Anne-Marie Hendrickson?

5 ANNE-MARIE HENDRICKSON: I do.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Director Jean Bae, you may
7 begin your testimony when you are ready.

8 JEAN BAE: Thank you so much. Before I begin my
9 testimony Immigration Committee Chair Carlos
10 Menchaca, you may not know my name and you may not
11 remember me but I actually have been participating
12 and observing and supporting your hearings and all of
13 your briefings etc. for the past year. And one of
14 the things that I absolutely admire about working at
15 Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs is that this
16 fight, what we usually think of city bureaucracy and
17 RFP and before I came to MOIA I worked in different
18 parts of city government. So, I am very used to it
19 but at MOIA, we truly appreciate you know, peoples
20 sort of expertise and their portfolio in their work
21 and it was our internal consensus that despite the
22 fact that I am actually not a housing expert, we have
23 HPD for that. But because all of my work,
24 particularly during the pandemic so far has been
25 focused on immigrants access to benefits. That's why
- and because Sabrina Fong has been doing all of our

3 amazing data analysis work that you have seen an
4 annual report and fact sheets, that we are the best
5 person to provide information here and I am deeply
6 honored. You know, I have watched you Council Member
7 Menchaca for a very long time, admired your work.
8 Same with Council Member Chin, always focusing on
9 immigrants. Council Member Dromm and all the other
10 Council Members here, I know the work that you are
11 doing for New York City immigrants and that's why I
12 feel very privileged to live in this city, work for
13 the city.

14 So, I just wanted to make that note and I will
15 start my testimony. Thank you very much.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you and welcome.
17 Thank you.

18 JEAN BAE: Thank you.

19 Thank you to Chair Menchaca, Chair Cornegy and
20 the members of the Committee on Immigration and the
21 Committee on Housing and Buildings for calling this
22 hearing. My name is Jean Bae and I am the Director
23 of Policy and Legislative Affairs for the Mayor's
24 Office of Immigrant Affairs. My role at MOIA focuses
25 on research as well as helping identify and address

3 barriers to access public benefits and city services
4 for immigrant New Yorkers.

5 Every New Yorker, regardless of immigration
6 status, deserves to have access to safe and
7 affordable housing. This work goes well beyond MOIA
8 and I am happy to be joined by Ahmed Tigani, Deputy
9 Commissioner of Neighborhood Strategies at New York
10 City Housing Preservation and Development, as well as
11 Anne-Marie Hendrickson, who is also the Deputy
12 Commissioner at HPD at this hearing.

13 Together, we have collaborated with many other
14 partner agencies who have been tasked with making New
15 York City an affordable city for all, which is a huge
16 task I understand. My testimony today will speak to
17 the data on housing disparities facing immigrant New
18 Yorkers and highlight some of the work MOIA has done
19 with our partners to address the housing-related
20 needs of immigrants during this pandemic.

21 Access to affordable housing is an issue that
22 affects all New Yorkers but the needs are higher for
23 immigrant communities. As of 2019 American Community
24 Survey data that Sabrina has out shows, almost one-
25 half, that's 47 percent of all New Yorkers are rent-
burdened, defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as

1 spending 30 percent or more of their household income
2 on rent.
3

4 This problem is greater for noncitizens as
5 Committee Chair Menchaca pointed out in the Committee
6 Report with the percentage of rent-burdened New
7 Yorkers highest for undocumented immigrants at about
8 51 percent. One in five immigrant New Yorkers reside
9 in overcrowded households, defined as having more
10 than one person per room. This includes an
11 approximately eight percent of the total immigrant
12 population who live in extremely overcrowded housing,
13 defined here as having more than 1.5 persons in the
14 room. And I know that I am preaching to the choir
15 here about this.

16 The pandemic has exacerbated these barriers.
17 Higher rates of overcrowding have made social
18 distancing more difficult for our immigrant
19 communities. Moreover, many immigrants and mixed-
20 status families were left out of federal stimulus
21 relief, even though immigrants have shown to be more
22 vulnerable to the economic impact of the pandemic and
23 contributed so much to our society as essential
24 workers and many of them taxpaying social member.
25

3 While the state and federal eviction moratoria
4 provided temporary relief for many families, housing
5 insecurity is interconnected with underlying
6 socioeconomic disparity and challenges immigrants
7 have faced long before the pandemic. We understand
8 that the city has taken steps to address affordable
9 housing issues from the very beginning of this
10 Administration.

11 The fight for affordable housing is a multi-
12 pronged one, with various agencies providing support
13 to address homelessness, providing tenant protections
14 and the creation and preservation of housing stock.
15 My colleague from HPD can provide additional details
16 about the ways in which the City has tackled
17 affordable housing, including for immigrants. I also
18 want to recognize the role of HRA's Office of Civil
19 Justice, the Mayor's Office to Protect Tenants and
20 the City Commission on Human Rights in ensuring that
21 all New Yorkers have access to the housing they need
22 and know their rights. MOIA's role in this area is
23 to advise the agency partners who are focused on
24 housing issues on immigration-specific issues, serve
25 to amplify the unique needs of immigrants and share
crucial information with the immigrant community.

3 During the COVID-19 pandemic, as it became clear
4 that federal assistance would not address the urgent
5 needs of our immigrant population, MOIA worked with
6 agency partners in identifying ways to alleviate the
7 immediate housing needs of immigrants. While MOIA
8 was able to advocate for and help secure private
9 funding for direct payments to immigrant New Yorkers,
10 as you are well aware, we also recognized that
11 further, housing-specific support was needed.
12 Through MOIA's and city including HPD's strong
13 advocacy, we secured \$12 million from various private
14 funders to serve those unable to access traditional
15 rental arrears assistance programs.

16 Building on the existing and successful efforts
17 of the Homebase program in keeping New Yorkers in
18 their homes, the Funds and Services for Tenants
19 Experiencing Need, which we call FASTEN program has
20 helped vulnerable and underserved New York residents
21 stay in their homes during COVID-19 by providing them
22 with rental arrears assistance, landlord mediation
23 and legal assistance, financial counseling, job
24 search assistance as well as referrals to resources
25 like food, affordable health services, utility
arrears assistance and other services.

3 So, for those who have you know, Mr. Bravo and
4 Mr. Cortez would testify before, I want to make sure
5 that you are aware of these city resources and take
6 advantage of them. They are looking for you and
7 wanting to help you.

8 Further, at the onset of the pandemic, MOIA
9 helped identify that immigrants were more likely to
10 reside in overcrowded households and worked with New
11 York City Health + Hospitals to inform the creation
12 of the City's COVID-19 Hotel Program to help all New
13 Yorkers safely quarantine or maintain social distance
14 from their family, loved ones or other household
15 members as needed. MOIA also worked with the program
16 to address concerns raised by immigrants on a variety
17 of issues, including concern around language access,
18 privacy and childcare. We also worked to ensure
19 programming information was made available in
20 multiple languages and promoted the program
21 throughout various digital and in-person outreach.
22 We collaborated with H+H to create videos providing a
23 tour of hotels and explaining the application
24 process.

25 This is in addition to the day-to-day work of
MOIA to promote the various housing resources

3 available to New Yorkers. Throughout the last year,
4 MOIA shared information about FASTEN, Homebase, the
5 Tenant Hotline, as well as the newly updated Housing
6 Connect 2.0, to tens of thousands of New Yorkers
7 through "Know Your Rights" presentations, direct
8 outreach through messenger apps and our other
9 programs that we work with our CBO partners to
10 provide services.

11 Housing Connect 2.0 is a new affordable housing
12 lottery system launched by HPD that expands access
13 and opportunities to all New Yorkers in need,
14 regardless of their current immigration status. In
15 2019, HPD established an alternative option to credit
16 checks by allowing applicants to provide 12
17 consecutive months of rental payment history,
18 essentially eliminating the requirement of a Social
19 Security Number or Individual Tax Identification
20 Number, which was a huge benefit for immigrant
21 communities.

22 Additionally, MOIA recently collaborated with HPD
23 to ensure IDNYC would be an accepted as a form of
24 identification in the new system. HPD's Housing
25 Ambassador program provides direct assistance for
this housing lottery process, including working with

3 applicants to obtain an ITIN and filling out the
4 application forms. Housing Ambassadors serve New
5 Yorkers where they are and in their language and HPD
6 offers this training to any Council staff. About 50
7 local organizations participate in the program and
8 they collectively speak more than 20 languages.

9 MOIA also supports our agency partners in
10 addressing the language access needs of tenants. For
11 example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, MOIA helped
12 translate critical materials that Mayor's Office to
13 Protect Tenant developed related to the eviction
14 moratorium and eviction prevention. MOIA also worked
15 with MOPT to make its website was more accessible by
16 adding multilingual links on its homepage that
17 connect users to translated information and resources
18 for people impacted by COVID.

19 Finally, MOIA also works with our agency partners
20 to oppose political changes that would exacerbate
21 housing challenges for immigrant New Yorkers. As
22 just one example, when HUD proposed a now withdrawn
23 rule to bar mixed-status families from residing in
24 public housing or receiving Section 8 benefits, MOIA
25 worked closely with agency partners to oppose change
through the submission of a multi-agency federal

3 comment. This is in addition to working with these
4 same agencies to oppose the public charge changes,
5 which had housing implications and which would have
6 devastated our immigrant communities. And I strongly
7 believe that it is through our litigation advocacy
8 that Public Charge rule was blocked and ultimately
9 happen withdrawn under this administration.

10 As I mentioned earlier, MOIA and the city are
11 gratified to see that the state has committed
12 billions of dollars to providing much needed support
13 to immigrant New Yorkers, regardless of their
14 immigration status, both in rental assistance and
15 more generally. This support will help address some
16 of the immediate needs of immigrant New Yorkers but
17 we also know and I am painfully aware as also an
18 immigrant, that more work needs to be done and the
19 city is committed to making continuous efforts to
20 achieve affordable housing for all.

21 I look forward to addressing any questions you
22 have and discuss this issue. Thank you again for
23 holding this hearing. I really appreciate it.

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
25 testimony. I would like to just acknowledge that
Council Members Eugene and Cabrera have joined us.

3 At this time, I am going to turn it over to questions
4 from Chair Menchaca followed by Chair Cornegy.
5 Panelists from the administration, please stay
6 unmuted if possible during this question and answer
7 period. Thank you. Chair Menchaca.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes, thank you and if
9 Chair Cornegy is here, do you want to ask questions
10 first and if not, I'll - yeah, go ahead Chair
11 Cornegy.

12 CHAIRPERSON CORNEGY: I am sorry, can you hear
13 me?

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: We got you.

15 JEAN BAE: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON CORNEGY: Sorry about that. So, let
17 me just get to - I am assuming I am at the questions
18 portion of this. I apologize, I got a dead signal.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes. Yeah, I am handing
20 it over to you for questions and then I will take on
21 questions and then we will hand it over to the
22 Committee members for questions.

23 CHAIRPERSON CORNEGY: Okay, thank you. So, uhm,
24 has MOIA seen federal rule proposals such as the
25 proposed HUD rule and Public Charge Rule under the
prior administration affect immigration New Yorkers

3 pursuit of local housing assistance programs and if
4 so, how? That was the big question, did you guys get
5 that?

6 JEAN BAE: Yes, are you asking if we know of the
7 rules or our response? I can answer yeah, the
8 questions. So, yes, we're unfortunately very
9 painfully aware of the HUD rule that was essentially
10 trying to exclude mixed status families from being
11 able to live in you know, federally assisted housing
12 as well as the Public Charge rule, which we have
13 played a very - in fact, many of our staff have spent
14 much of their time on in responding to. That would
15 have made it really difficult for people to access
16 very, very critical public benefits, including
17 Section 8 Vouchers and certain housing assistance
18 that are more provided directly through cash
19 assistance. We have provided comments through the
20 federal agencies addressing you know our concern and
21 the devastating impact that it would have on immigrant
22 communities. The importance of providing the support
23 for immigrant communities.

24 In you know, coordination with HPD and many other
25 agencies, we have also you know done a lot of direct
advocacy including filing a litigation in case of

1 Public Charge Rule, which has resulted in an in fact
2 a Preliminary injunction, although there were so many
3 times the injunction was blocked and they went
4 forward that it's kind of hard to keep track of you
5 know, what has happened and we are very relieved to
6 know that both of those rules now have been withdrawn
7 by the new administration. And we fully understand
8 that now the biggest issue is public messaging. That
9 you know, not all immigrants are aware of the latest
10 development of these policies. Meaning these
11 policies are gone, which is why we are still
12 committed to continuing our support in their Fear
13 Campaign, which is our advertising and digital
14 marketing campaign and as well as yeah, campaign to
15 make sure that immigrants are aware of the city
16 resources to consult before they think about applying
17 for or withdrawing from any public benefits
18 encouraging them to make use of those resources. And
19 we are doing the same relating to HUD Rule as well.
20 Working closely with NYCHA, HPD and other agencies to
21 make sure that immigrants have full information about
22 what is going on and do not feel discouraged about
23 utilizing benefits that they are entitled to and they
24 should utilize.
25

3 CHAIRPERSON CORNEGY: So, thank you for that. If
4 there is a way that both myself and obviously Council
5 Menchaca's office can be instrumental in
6 disseminating that information to our respective
7 communities, the immigrant communities at large,
8 certainly I would like to offer an opportunity to do
9 that in partnership.

10 JEAN BAE: Of course, I mean Council you know,
11 Committee Chair Cornegy and particularly Committee
12 Chair Menchaca, both of your offices have always been
13 incredibly helpful to us in disseminating information
14 and in fact, I believe we regularly get our
15 information, the latest information on policy changes
16 or new resources that we get through your office and
17 we will definitely continue to do that and would love
18 to bring storm about what is the better way to
19 practically do outreach to immigrant communities to
20 make sure that this information is out there.

21 CHAIRPERSON CORNEGY: Thank you. So, in 2019,
22 MOIA worked with HPD to alter the housing lottery
23 rules in a way that expanded eligibility to immigrant
24 New Yorkers. What other ways can the city alter its
25 eligibility requirements to program applications to

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3 extend more housing assistance to more immigrant New
4 Yorkers?

5 JEAN BAE: From MOIA and because we – I think
6 probably for the best, given my knowledge of housing
7 that we don't directly address the actual laws and
8 policies relating to you know, immigrants eligibility
9 for programs. But we always work together with and
10 advise relating to the impact of these different
11 eligibility restrictions on immigrants and relating.
12 You know 2019 changed to Housing Connect has been
13 such an exciting development for us and we have done
14 you know a lot to basically promote that information
15 in the communities through our communication channel,
16 our outreach, Know Your Rights presentations and
17 these different ways. And relating to any you know
18 further policy changes that we are contemplating, as
19 of now for the – because of the sort of imminent
20 peoples, imminent concern as the testimonies have
21 provided about sort of rental arrears and the burden
22 of having to pay for the rent and the concern about
23 housing direct, immediate housing stability during
24 the pandemic. That was sort of what we have been
25 mainly focused on but for the more long-term housing,
which is obviously much more important than providing

1 stability and how policy changes are being
2 considered, I defer to Ahmed. And Ahmed, please so
3 ahead.
4

5 AHMED TIGANI: Sure, good morning Chairs and
6 thanking members of the Committee. Thank you for
7 this opportunity to speak on this topic. Because
8 this is the first time I am getting to speak today, I
9 just want to also thank Mr. Bravo and Mr. Cortez for
10 their comments. As someone who long ago, his family
11 also received help from the same organization living
12 in Sunset, lucky enough to receive a housing voucher
13 and be able to grow and be a part of the city. I
14 truly recognize where that gratitude comes from and
15 also recognize them as a great organization.

16 Building on the comment from my colleague from
17 MOIA, for us, we are looking at ways just to reduce
18 the barriers. Being able to access these services.
19 It comes from a couple of things. A. We have to meet
20 people where they are. We need to make sure that we
21 know how best they are able to receive this
22 information, especially in this ongoing crisis.
23 Whether they are home, whether they are essential
24 workers and their time is limited and how best to
25 deliver that message to them. Whether it is through

1
2 a virtual communication, whether it is through
3 limited in person, socially distance, safe contact,
4 we are talking with our community partners on the
5 ground. Which comes to our point to you, working
6 with those who work in the community, have that
7 credibility, are recognized as having that best
8 interest.

9 Again, given the comments made earlier about what
10 we are coming from. A place where government was
11 seen as coming after their status, we want to be of
12 help to them and we know that that is a long road
13 that requires us to show up, provide help and to
14 bring people with us who have been helping them all
15 along so that they see we are doing this in
16 partnership. We have to make sure that we are doing
17 this is a way that is culturally sensitive. That is
18 recognizing the various and diverse and large array
19 of languages that are spoken in our community and
20 putting people in the field who are able to deliver
21 this message, whether virtually or in person. Making
22 sure that the translations are accurate. Making sure
23 that we are getting the right connotations and the
24 right translations, getting the right message out
25 there.

3 We also need to make sure that we are doing this
4 in a way that we are being both present at different
5 times. We can't just be available to provide this
6 information at one particular hour and assume that we
7 are going to get everyone we need. These are people
8 who are essential workers. These are people who work
9 nontraditional jobs, nontraditional lives, so that
10 they can make means and live and be a part and give
11 back to the city.

12 So, we need to again, meet them where they are.
13 And from the rules and the regulation perspective,
14 you already see from the housing lottery perspective
15 where we are trying to find ways to be flexible. To
16 show the points that we need to show without using
17 restrictions that may be on the table or hard to get
18 for our fellow immigrant New Yorkers. And if there
19 are other ways, we will continue to do so and we
20 welcome any items.

21 CHAIRPERSON CORNEGY: So, thank you for that. I
22 have a question and then I will come back to another
23 round if I have the opportunity but my final question
24 in this round is, so this particular hearing was
25 about obviously Council Member Dromm's Resolution but
the real theme of it was that there this segment

3 about population that finds itself generally
4 ineligible for the services that are available. Even
5 the ones that are eligible are on the margins and the
6 fringes but there is a huge portion that is
7 ineligible simply based on their immigration status.

8 And for myself and also obviously for Council
9 Member Menchaca, there is way too many people who
10 fall into that category who are now rent burdened and
11 who are substandard housing and overcrowding and all
12 of those kinds of things exacerbated certainly by the
13 pandemic.

14 I am curious as to what partnerships with CBO's
15 has MOIA leveraged to provide housing assistance for
16 those immigrants, who like we have said are currently
17 ineligible for federally funded programs.

18 JEAN BAE: Absolutely, thank you for the question
19 and you know as in my office, they jokingly call me
20 as a COVID Czar. And so, as somebody who has been
21 working on the pandemic response, I mean there is a
22 question that's more – you know, there is no question
23 that goes more straight to the heart and just like
24 you know breaks my heart than that one.

25 You know, undocumented immigrants have been
disproportionately, economically you know affected in

3 terms of losing their jobs, losing their income, not
4 being able to find jobs, having increased expenses.
5 They also had a disproportionate health impact,
6 losing their family members and being themselves sick
7 and having all those issues and yet, they are
8 systematically excluded from the existing public
9 benefits.

10 You know, part of this is a terrible federal law
11 that exists to restrict any federal benefits from
12 being available to anyone, as well as making it a
13 preventing state and local government for the most
14 part and being able to provide sort of more direct
15 public assistance to undocumented immigrants and all
16 those sort of legal barriers make it really
17 challenging for immigrants to access these benefits.
18 But it is precisely for this reason that at the
19 beginning of the pandemic our primary focus has been
20 trying to deliver as much of a direct assistance.

21 In fact, we know that cash is the most fungible
22 thing and most seeable thing for people to have in
23 their hands at the — you know, at the especially in
24 the moment of crisis. So, that's why we launched the
25 COVID-19 Emergency Relief Program in coordination
with Open Society Foundation and there was \$20

1 million. Which you know, sounds like a big number
2 but is just a tiny drop in the bucket compared to the
3 need but still we were extremely grateful and we work
4 with the – specifically work with community-based
5 organizations to provide this funding to immigrant
6 communities because of the trust that we have and
7 these CBOs relationship with the communities and
8 their ability to access the needs of immigrants and
9 being able to provide direct support and from that,
10 you know, we are able to track at least some of the
11 spending, as to how the spending was done because the
12 money was provided through a prepaid card. Although
13 they were able to just withdraw cash, so a lot of
14 people just decided to withdraw cash directly. And
15 from that and based on what they have reported as
16 their needs, we know that you know in fact number one
17 needs have been identified as being able to pay rent.

19 And so, we know that that was like one of the
20 critical issues and that was you know what we were
21 focusing on in providing assistance. And knowing
22 that rental assistance provides such as a critical,
23 such a big – imposes such a big pressure on immigrant
24 communities, that's why we work together with HPD,
25 DSS and you know other partners to launch the Fasten

1
2 Program, which is again going around the legal
3 barriers that you have just identified in city's
4 existing funding that cannot directly go to
5 immigrants. Through the assistance of private
6 partners we have raised \$12 million and that allowed
7 us to help immigrants, undocumented immigrants who
8 cannot get these assistance to get the rental
9 assistance, including rental arrear payment,
10 negotiating with the landlord, as well as identify
11 potential new housing that will provide more
12 stability and including for instance a case of like
13 first month and deposit and a lot of the other wrap
14 around you know assistance that they need.

15 So, those are sort of the main things that we
16 have worked on and I will also pass it on to Ahmed to
17 chime in with the amazing work that HPD has been
18 doing.

19 AHMED TIGANI: Again, thank you for that comment
20 and the opportunity to add. I think what's important
21 about Fasten is also to recognize that these
22 organizations that we work also overlap with much of
23 the other work that we do. Whether it be one of our
24 you know 50 plus housing ambassador programs located
25 throughout all the five boroughs. They are part of

3 our protective enforcement strategy. You know, there
4 is seriously a need and I agree with you Chair that
5 we need to expand the options here.

6 One thing is to provide affordable housing to
7 help immobility. The other is to make sure the
8 housing that people have is safe and that if there
9 are issues with that housing that we are out there
10 doing enforcement.

11 As you know, we have an aggressive tenant
12 harassment strategy that collaborates across city
13 government that includes the Mayor's Office to
14 protect tenants. It includes MOIA. It includes
15 Department of Buildings. It includes state and other
16 partners who focus on housing, who focus on special
17 investigations.

18 We, in last year alone, we did 1,500 buildings.
19 We are aggressively taking landlords to court if
20 there are issues. We are forcing repairs. We are
21 making sure that when recommendations come our way,
22 we are going after those bad actors. In addition, we
23 are not waiting for people to come and issue
24 complaints. We have organized work throughout,
25 especially communities of color throughout the city

3 where we are working hand and glove with organizers
4 in buildings.

5 I also want to recognize that what's very
6 important during this time of COVID is tenant
7 organizing is a very personal relationship, that's
8 built between people in the building and the folks
9 who are there to help them make that work happen.
10 Whether it is them themselves, their neighbors
11 involved or an organization that comes in and cares
12 about their neighborhood.

13 We recognize that COVID has brought up a lot of
14 questions about how tenant organizing is going to
15 happen before and I am amazed at how creative and how
16 dynamic and persistent people are about making sure
17 this work happens. We are learning a lot about how
18 again to approach the mixed message of both virtual
19 and in person so that we continue to get this
20 information, continue to do our collaborative work
21 with agencies like DOB to make sure that we are
22 looking at both the housing maintenance code and the
23 building code so that if there are issues, we are
24 addressing them all in one swoop. So, tenants don't
25 have to wait much longer to get those issues
addressed.

3 CHAIRPERSON CORNEGY: Thank you. I am going to
4 turn it back over for questions from my Co-Chair but
5 I want to say Housing and Buildings is [AUDIO DROPPED
6 1:12:17. It is absolutely a priority to make sure
7 that there is safety and that you know that our
8 communities which are living on the fringes and are
9 susceptible of overcrowding in some instances but
10 also just unsafe, unhealthy conditions are not
11 flushed out to hurt the tenants but actually are
12 flushed out so that we can provide the necessary
13 safety so that people can live with the quality of
14 life no matter what the immigration status is as any
15 human being should do.

16 So, my commitment from the Housing and Buildings
17 Chairmanship remains. I look forward to a continued
18 partnership with MOIA, certainly a continued
19 partnership with my Co-Chair Carlos Menchaca to
20 ensure that as a city and at these two Committees or
21 my Committee at least has a sincere focus on making
22 sure that we can provide safe, affordable housing to
23 every single human being in the City of New York.

24 So, thank you. My Co-Chair is going to take over
25 for me. I will be returning to him but I am leaving

3 it in probably the most capable hands for this topic
4 that I know in the New York City Council. Thank you
5 MOIA for your testimony. Thank you Council Member
6 Menchaca for your partnership. Thank you Council
7 Member Dromm for always being a star on issues that
8 are germane to marginalize communities and in this
9 case, our immigrant community.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Chair Cornegy
11 for that and I look forward to continuing this,
12 especially some ideas that are already popping up in
13 my head about how we can really bring that to
14 fruition.

15 We have been joined by Council Member Perkins as
16 well and I am going to hold my questions and pass it
17 over to Council Members who have questions before we
18 start losing any of them. This is a really important
19 topic and I want to hear from them as well.

20 Committee Council Harbani Ahuja.

21 COMMITTEE COUNCIL: Thank you Chair. I am going
22 to be calling on Council Members in the order in
23 which they have raised their hands. Just as a
24 reminder, if you would like to ask a question, please
25 use the Zoom raise hand function and we will call on

1
2 you in order. We will start with Council Member
3 Chin.

4 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you. Thank you
6 Chair. I also have a Youth Service Committee hearing
7 that just started and thank you for allowing me to
8 ask the question first.

9 It is great to hear all the great work that MOIA
10 and HPD has been doing to help immigrant tenants join
11 the pandemic. What I wanted to touch on is that, how
12 do we create more supply of affordable housing that
13 immigrants can apply for whatever their status is?
14 And now there are limits because you know, a lot of
15 the new projects, if they had federal funding the
16 immigrants who are undocumented is not qualified.

17 But the City could offer that flexibility if we
18 can look at getting you know private investment
19 together with city funding resources to create more
20 affordable housing.

21 So, I guess Deputy Commissioner Tigani, is really
22 seeing you in this great new role and I want to
23 really work with HPD, really strategize. Like, how
24 can we create the affordable housing that's greatly
25 needed? Like for example in my district, we are

3 trying to legalize as Chair Cornegy talked about, how
4 to make housing safe and people are already living in
5 those situations where it's not an apartment. They
6 just have a space that they could afford. They share
7 kitchens and they share a bathroom but it is
8 affordable and a lot of them living there are seniors
9 and immigrants and some of them are undocumented.
10 And I want to look at HPD to finding resources to
11 help this type of housing to become legal.

12 The other is that how do we look at through
13 rezoning and we are creating affordable housing. How
14 do we make sure that those housing that we create are
15 open to everyone and not limited to only people who
16 are documented? I think that is the second thing.

17 The third thing is that I know the City and the
18 Administration, the Mayor expanded this home share
19 program that were targeting seniors and that creates
20 opportunity for seniors that might not have you know,
21 all the paperwork to apply for government you know,
22 senior housing but that is a great program. But
23 often times what I have seen is that the rent is too
24 high, right?

25 So, how do we create some subsidy to allow these
seniors to take advantage of Homeless Share Program?

3 Because you might have another senior who happen to
4 have a house and they have a two bedroom apartment
5 and they can have a roommate. But what they are
6 charging is a lot more than what a regular low-income
7 senior could afford and how do we create programs
8 where the city can provide some subsidy where we can
9 really fully utilize some of these programs?

10 So, Deputy Commissioner, I know that you are part
11 of like a strategic thinking there. How do we create
12 more affordable housing and legalize some of the
13 units that we already have in the city that
14 immigrants are living in there? How do we make it
15 stay and legal and affordable?

16 AHMED TIGANI: Well, Council Member Chin, thank
17 you for that question. There are a lot of different
18 parts to that question, so I will try to adjust what
19 I can in different segments. But I think where you
20 are aware, we are as an agency is exactly in the same
21 place. We want to create as much safe, accessible,
22 quality and equitable housing as we can in New York
23 City to make sure it is accessible to the greatest
24 number of people.

25 The Mayor's Housing Plan as you know, has been an
expansive effort to try to create and finance that

1 type of housing. As of March, we have already
2 financed approximately 170,000 affordable homes.
3 That's enough to serve nearly 450,000 New Yorkers.
4 You know, within that, we have made a commitment to
5 both make a serious allocation towards senior housing
6 and housing for those who need extremely low or low-
7 income housing you know, for units that are between
8 30 and 50 percent AMI.
9

10 We are at building housing for families that make
11 around \$31,000 per family and we have built already
12 3,511 units. Again, while that's a great number, we
13 know that we have to do more. The goal toward
14 building housing is two part. Our predevelopment
15 work where we are leveraging the public sites and
16 both in our development teams, where we are working
17 with owners and landholders to bring them in and
18 figure out the best way to move it toward an
19 affordable public purpose for building on those
20 locations.

21 We worked with you successfully to bring quality
22 senior housing to your district. We try to
23 replicated those kinds of conversations with the
24 community, so that we make sure these developments
25 are successful. The, I think the big part of it

3 beyond those standard yet very complex development
4 projects, is our ability to think outside the box.

5 So, you know, we recently, not too long ago,
6 released Share NYC as a proposal on a plan. We want
7 to see looking at the shared rooming unit concept.
8 It's a concept that you know, mirrors in some ways
9 the type of housing that you are talking about while
10 at the same time, making sure it is in the affordable
11 rubric that make it accessible to as many people as
12 possible.

13 This is a housing concept that's now catching
14 fire at other parts of the country and we see that
15 there is a demand for that kind of flexible housing
16 if it can be delivered in an affordable way.

17 Separate and apart from that, you know we want to
18 look for housing that has people invested in the
19 equity. We want to see people be able to contribute
20 in a way that successful, affordable housing
21 cooperatives have for decades now. And so, that's
22 why we issued our shared equity RFP in March, so that
23 we can solicit those ideas from the larger housing
24 thinktank community from anyone who wants to submit
25 ideas on how we can build affordable housing and

3 still build equity into that model in a cooperative
4 fashion.

5 So, we are not resting on just the focus on
6 traditional construction. Using public funds to make
7 sure that we build affordable housing. We are
8 looking outside the box. Looking at the housing
9 concept that you mention now to see if that's
10 something that we could deliver on a scalable level.
11 We are looking at other ideas as shared equity, so we
12 can make that accessible. And of course, when it
13 comes to the financing piece, which I am no means an
14 expert and we have a very talented affordable housing
15 finance team and I can always come back to you and we
16 can talk further about it. You know, development is
17 a – it could be a very expensive and complex process.
18 So, we do use a mixture of both private, public, we
19 use state, federal and local funds.

20 This Mayor has made an enormous commitment of
21 city funds to see that we can make accessible housing
22 happen. And if there are other ways we can further
23 involve, we will. And so, I am happy to connect with
24 you after to talk about what we can do in
25 partnership.

3 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Yeah, I think lastly is
4 just you know right now there are going to be
5 opportunities opening up. I mean, looking at some of
6 the MT office buildings or hotels that are not
7 surviving and those might be the opportunities to
8 create affordable housing.

9 But I just also want to make sure that you know,
10 in terms of affordable housing yes, family housing is
11 important but don't forget the single individual.
12 That's why you know back in the old days we have you
13 know single room occupancy. And a lot of those
14 buildings were turned into hotels and we lost a lot
15 of affordable housing for individuals. And I think
16 we could bring some of those back as safe housing for
17 immigrants, for seniors and really seize those
18 opportunities. Because what happened in the 80's
19 when the city, you know the economy was down, they
20 were converting a lot of office buildings into
21 residential but unfortunately, it was not affordable.

22 I mean, those were market rate housing and then
23 turned into market rate co-op and we lost that
24 opportunity and right now we want to seize that
25 opportunity. We got to make sure that the housing
that we create are housing for working people. For

1 COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS 66
3 low-income, moderate-income and immigrant population
4 and let's not lose the opportunity again.

5 So, I look forward to working with HPD and I
6 think there are so much possibility that we can do to
7 great, affordable housing for the immigrant
8 community. Thank you. Thank you Chair.

9 AHMED TIGANI: Thank you.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member
11 Chin. I am just going to quickly ask again if there
12 are any other Council Members that have questions,
13 please use the Zoom raise hand function now.

14 Seeing no other hands, I am going to turn it back
15 to Chair Menchaca for questions.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank you
17 Committee Counsel Harbani Ahuja. I want to actually
18 start with the – one of the first questions that
19 Chair Cornegy asked to MOIA, to the Mayor's Office of
20 Immigrant Affairs and really just dig deeper about
21 these federal rules and proposals, the HUD Rule and
22 Public Charge. We did a lot of work to organize
23 together to bring better information. We are looking
24 at, we have landed where we are now but it had a lot
25 of impact, a chilling effect.

3 And so, have you measured? I know that we talk a
4 lot about what we are doing but are you measuring
5 that chilling effect as it pertains to the housing
6 assistance programs that are currently available?

7 JEAN BAE: You are basically like giving me a
8 flashback of the uhm, meeting that Sabrina and I had.
9 It is you know, measuring the chilling effect is that
10 one of the top priorities for us. In fact, it is
11 probably our number one priority in terms of our
12 research work. But it is also as you know
13 particularly challenging area you know because of the
14 lack of actually quantifiable data. And we actually
15 happen for instance, talking to some of the agencies
16 that administer public benefits like SNAP or housing
17 and some of the other benefits to see if there are
18 ways to detect sort of a trend. In terms of the
19 chilling effect of the challenges that we have seen
20 so far is that there are so many other confounding
21 factors including seasonal effect, economy, etc.
22 It's really hard to see that. So, we are thinking
23 you know basically beyond that to see if there are
24 other ways that we can do that. Including survey
25 with the clients that we encounter through our
programs or implementing a more specific survey that

3 is more you know like through a sampling approach but
4 I am going to defer to Sabrina who probably thinks,
5 oh God Jean is like – she doesn't know what she is
6 talking about to provide more details and more
7 rigorous yeah information.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah and I would love to
9 get some numbers. It sounds like you are doing
10 surveys. That's what we are trying to get to. Thank
11 you.

12 SABRINA FONG: I don't have honestly too much to
13 add except perhaps to note that like by design a lot
14 of our programs are designed not to ask any questions
15 about immigration status, which I then deliberately
16 makes it really hard to measure you know if there is
17 a chilling effect which populations are being
18 impacted most and why.

19 To Jean's point, there are so many changes
20 particularly with the pandemic that might effect
21 uptake of benefits. But to Jean's point, it is
22 something we think about often and we work with a lot
23 of community-based organizations and our partners
24 just to hear anecdotally about what is happening on
25 the ground. And you know, hopefully we can get
numbers but I think it is often easier for different

3 programs and where we have numbers, we have released
4 them in different fact sheets like we have done in
5 the past including around SNAP, around WIC. And then
6 other surveys that we have done around awareness of
7 public charge in general but I think housing in
8 particular is really tough to measure as a household
9 measure but nothing further to share at this point.

10 JEAN BAE: Yeah, just to add to that, it is
11 something that we - I just want to note that even
12 though we cannot share any numbers because it has
13 been you know really challenging to get sort of like
14 exact quantification of the effect. It is something
15 that we are constantly thinking about and not just
16 thinking about the actual action to see what is
17 available. You know and we would love to actually
18 collaborate with you if you have ideas or you know if
19 you have a certain initiative in mind. I think this
20 is actually one of those you know areas that's so
21 important but also because our research team is so
22 small, meaning just us. And so, having you know
23 other partners who can really help us would be
24 incredibly you know valuable in being able to
25 actually do more of this. So, I really appreciate
further discussion.

3 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, awesome thank you.

4 I don't, I should say, I appreciate the fact that it
5 is hard to measure because we are trying to be as
6 respectful and understanding of immigrant engagement
7 and not asking the questions is where we want to go.
8 So, I appreciate that.

9 I think that I want to see some movement here and
10 even some experimentation about how we can get
11 information and I think what you heard from the first
12 two speakers on the testimony side, we heard very
13 clearly that they also want access to just funding,
14 so that they can pay for rent.

15 And I think that we can measure it, not just by
16 saying hey, is there a chilling affect but say, here
17 is a service. Here is a universal basic income pilot
18 program that can offer rent and then see who signs up
19 and see if we can get that need. And I think we can
20 really offer multiple tools but the issue is
21 resources. How do we get resources into hands of our
22 undocumented community members that are having
23 housing crisis issues and there is a big plan that we
24 can really come together around.

25 So, I think that's another way to understand it.
Not just by the chilling but by the access and if we

3 give access to resource, then we have something and
4 we are in the middle of a budget conversation to and
5 I think that's where we can really build something.
6 And a pilot, and this is something that members that
7 I and others are thinking a lot about and we want to
8 put some meat to these bones, is measurable.

9 We can measure who is coming with the eligibility
10 that we can create. So, that's just an example.
11 That's an example.

12 JEAN BAE: Yes, absolutely and as you know, you
13 know in fact with your heavy support, you know we
14 have done the cash assistance program. And I was
15 very happy to hear that you know Mr. Bravo actually
16 got what I think was our funding through the Urban
17 Justice Center and I think you know it is something
18 that we definitely understand that there is a
19 continuing and in fact even bigger need for. And
20 wanting to actually you know provide that continued
21 support. It's something that you know we don't
22 necessarily think of as a one time thing and we are
23 continuing to work on and we would you know love to
24 be able to continue through and you know collaborate
25 with you and think about new ways that we can create

3 more resources for people who are left out of the
4 existing benefits.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Great and I think that's
6 the sweet spot. Let's move over to HPD and Deputy
7 Commissioner Tigani. Has HPD noted a decrease in
8 enrollees for any of the housing assistant programs?
9 I am looking for numbers here. Over the last four
10 years and any analysis from those numbers about any
11 decreases and back to the chilling effects. How have
12 you measured that and analyzed that?

13 AHMED TIGANI: So, Chair at this time, I don't
14 have specific numbers. I can come back to you but I
15 will tell you that the housing voucher program of our
16 world as you know for many reasons, it's not
17 something that is accessible to the New Yorkers that
18 we are talking about. But that is a consistent need
19 that is taxed on a regular basis. There is always a
20 present need. In fact, the need is much greater than
21 I think the city is in need of more affordable
22 housing.

23 So, in the world of housing vouchers, that's a
24 very consistent. From the perspective of affordable
25 housing and the housing lottery, my colleague Deputy
Mayor - I am sorry, Deputy Commissioner Hendrickson

3 can add but we are constantly seeing you know huge,
4 huge requests for placement in our affordable
5 housing, which is a clear sign to us that – and keeps
6 the pressure on us to continue to find more public
7 sites developing into affordable housing. More
8 partnerships with holders of that housing to either
9 preserve or create new housing. The need is
10 extensive but Deputy Commissioner Hendrickson, if you
11 have anything to add to that.

12 ANNE-MARIE HENDRICKSON: Yeah, good afternoon
13 everyone. I am sorry my video doesn't work, so I do
14 apologize. Ahmed, I think you said it well. I don't
15 want to give a number and be incorrect but I think
16 your point about in terms of the lotteries that we
17 conduct, we always have tremendously more people
18 applying for the lotteries than there are units. So,
19 again, we continue to see you know many New Yorkers
20 seeking affordable housing. Many New Yorkers seeking
21 to preserve affordable housing and we are doing our
22 best to try to keep up that pace of building and
23 preserving housing. So, we continue keeping that
24 work.

25 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Well, and so, we definitely
want to get those numbers. This is part of how we

3 want to build the programs and be experimental. The
4 budget this year is changing for the better and this
5 is the opportunity to really work together to figure
6 out what can work. And as I understand it and this
7 is just my district experience in Sunset Park with
8 affordable housing lottery programs, 100 percent
9 affordable programs with Fifth Avenue Committee
10 undocumented community members can apply. And that
11 application and that entrance is a very specific kind
12 of entrance through things like an I10 number. And
13 so, those are ways that we can look at it and see how
14 are people applying and are those increases being
15 looked at in trends across the city where especially
16 when we can overlay immigrant community population
17 through Census or non-English speaking community
18 members.

19 And so, there are ways to really, this is what we
20 are trying to get at and really understand so we can
21 build policy and programs around that.

22 AHMED TIGANI: I will just add Chair that it's
23 for that reason that we put so much emphasis back in
24 staff and resources into our housing ambassador
25 program. We have tried to equip them and also grow
that core beyond you know the number of organizations

3 that we have throughout the boroughs but also
4 bringing in Council Offices, elected offices. Any
5 stakeholder who we can train to know these rules and
6 provide that information because I don't you know; I
7 don't want anyone not to realize that they have a
8 path forward. We want people applying for housing.
9 And then on the backend, our development of
10 preplanning our public site development is there to
11 try to create more stock to get people into that
12 borough housing.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, so we will follow up
14 very shortly after this and see what we can get and
15 what we can ascertain and build. With enough time to
16 see if we can get something into the budget this
17 year.

18 It's not a budget hearing, I get it but it is -
19 can inform some really creative policy and the budget
20 window is closing.

21 So, let's talk about the Mitchell Lama program,
22 which requires applicants to provide documentation as
23 proof of eligibility that may act as a barrier to
24 sort of immigrant applicants. How has HPD and MOIA
25 collaborated to alter eligibility requirements there
and open more eligibility to all immigrant New

3 Yorkers? And this is also with so much praise to
4 that 2019 and I think the housing lottery rules that
5 Chair Cornegy pointed to was great. It's a great
6 opportunity.

7 And so, we are looking for that kind of what's
8 happening there and are you looking at some other
9 ways to do expansion of eligibility.

10 JEAN BAE: I can start just from you know MOIA's
11 perspective. All of the I think in fact, the reason
12 my position exists and I am getting paid is because of
13 all the barriers that you are just identifying. That
14 you know immigrants are experiencing and trying to
15 access public benefits. And you know one of the key
16 ways a part from just their immigration status which
17 we have had a lot of discussion about today and you
18 know obviously is something that is near and dear to
19 my heart for us is documentation is a lot. It is
20 incredibly challenging for them, whether it is like
21 proving their identity and their residence or you
22 know their income etc. And that always has been a
23 big issue.

24 As well as you know just like hesitance and fear
25 and in our government agencies and so, I think part
of the ways that we have been collaborating with HPD

3 and the reason we really appreciate HPD's you know
4 Housing Ambassador program as well as Housing Connect
5 Portal in general is that it is you know we have I
6 think really successfully collaborated in sort of
7 trying to reduce some of those barriers that you know
8 IDNYC which is something that we you know do and make
9 it a lot easier for immigrants who may not have all
10 those documentations to be able to obtain their you
11 know identity card to be able to use that to access
12 housing connect or whether it's as I talked about,
13 not needing to have a Social Security number or even
14 I10 number to be able to still access Housing Connect
15 if they can prove their you know income history in
16 the past and oh, sorry, payment history in the past
17 and uhm, and uhm, as well as sort of always working
18 with the community-based organizations which I know
19 it is something you know Council Chair Menchaca, you
20 feel very passionate about.

21 Like they are directly connected to the community
22 members and they have their trust. And so, for them
23 to be able to actually provide assistance and you
24 know giving the confidence that this is something
25 that immigrants really should feel entitled to. That
they should you know apply and seek assistance

3 because it is their tax money and you know the city
4 is providing these services.

5 So, that's sort of what MOIA and also we are
6 doing you know in collaboration with the CBO's and
7 HPD and I will let Ahmed chime in with a further
8 discussion about yeah, how we are expanding immigrant
9 eligibility.

10 AHMED TIGANI: Yeah and thank you and I am going
11 to touch on some points and I am going to also ask my
12 colleague who is very well versed in this topic to
13 add but you know, while there are laws. Mitchell
14 Lama as you require a New York City residency and in
15 the same vein, others also require US residency for
16 head of household when you are dealing with Section
17 237. Even in that world, imagine an agency not
18 inquire about the legal status of applicants. People
19 don't need to get a hat, provide the green card or
20 any type of documentation that would show that they
21 are in the country legally. The requirement of New
22 York City residency can be satisfied with a driver's
23 license, a lease, a bill, a credit card etc. and it
24 does not require documentation that a legal resident
25 show that residency requirement.

3 So, that I think is an important note to make.

4 And then Anne-Marie, if there is anything more you
5 would like to add.

6 ANNE-MARIE HENDRICKSON: Yes, thanks Council
7 Member for that question. And just to be clear, you
8 know Mitchell Lama's are not advertised in Housing
9 Connect. They have a separate kind of lottery
10 process for Mitchell Lama connect. And those
11 lotteries are only really used when the developments
12 need to replenish their wait list. I mean Mitchell
13 Lama's you know again because they are so affordable
14 and there has been so much demand, there are existing
15 wait lists that are really in place for many of the
16 developments.

17 So, again, we do have on our website a list of
18 all the Mitchell Lama's that have shorter wait lists
19 and of course veterans. You know whether they are
20 immigrants great. They would go to the top of the
21 external wait list. So, that's really how Mitchell
22 Lama operates is the state you know legislative type
23 of program and there is a little bit less flexibility
24 in that program than others.

25 But again, because the wait list is so long,
typically, apartments are not really being advertised

3 outside of using existing wait lists to get people
4 who have been waiting many, many years for those
5 apartments.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you for that and it
7 makes me think about the Home First Down Payment
8 Program. The assistance program that provides
9 qualifying home buyers with up to \$40,000 towards a
10 down payment. We have received reports that while
11 individuals were found eligible for the program,
12 financial lenders were unwilling to provide the
13 financing necessary to complete a home purchase, due
14 to the individuals immigration status.

15 What relationship does the city have with these
16 lenders, relationship/you know power to really
17 influence and connect to the lenders? And then how
18 does the city leverage these relationships to ensure
19 that the qualifying New Yorkers aren't turned away
20 from these third party lenders and kept from
21 purchasing a home? This is a game changer for so
22 many and it's not only possible. This is where we
23 want to move for every community that needs it but
24 today's hearing is for immigrants.

25 AHMED TIGANI: So, again, thank you for that
question Chair. This is the first I am hearing of

3 this particular issue and we can certainly go back.
4 Maybe we will reach out to your office if we need
5 more information. Certainly, specific cases etc. but
6 obviously the city you know will not tolerate when
7 the rules and regulations aren't followed. The
8 participating lenders are our partners and we will
9 look into this issue and we will certainly get all of
10 the information and come back to you. And if there
11 are people who should be eligible and should have an
12 opportunity through this program, we want to make
13 sure that they have that opportunity. I just think
14 we are going to need a little bit more information
15 sir.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, happy to and I don't
17 know if this is something on MOIA's radar at all.
18 Has this come in through in hotline? Have you seen
19 it percolate as an issue?

20 JEAN BAE: From our outreach organizers, we have
21 our organizers. Uhm, I think generally, usually as
22 you know the vast majority of immigrants are renting
23 their place rather than owning or trying to own. So,
24 most of the story we hear is relating to their you
25 know application to the landlord and having trouble.
For instance, because they don't have Social Security

1 numbers but even relating to mortgage, our
2 understanding is that you know that is something that
3 although I don't whether I know of the specific
4 instance, I will have to go back to the outreach team
5 but I am very closely in touch with them and what we
6 generally hear and you know we think is again a huge
7 problem and I have been doing a lot. That's why Know
8 Your Rights, our program is very important but we are
9 hoping to do more work on in collaboration with you,
10 is the fact that a lot of times whether it is
11 landlords or employers or you know people who are
12 getting mortgage brokers or whoever, there is this
13 misconceived notion the Social Security number is
14 required everywhere when that is not necessarily the
15 case.
16

17 And also, when you don't have that, having
18 suddenly have to go through barriers that other
19 people don't which is definitely you know a violation
20 of the City Human Rights Law as well as the State
21 Human Rights Law.

22 And so, that's sort of the general issues we are
23 definitely aware of and it is something that we are
24 paying a lot of attention to.
25

3 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: What power does the city
4 have over these lenders? Like, can you regulate
5 here? Can you really kind of come in and say, this
6 is not okay and what kind of power does the city
7 have? Do we know?

8 AHMED TIGANI: So, again these are participating
9 lenders who are – these are specific lenders who we
10 say are allowed to be part of this program. So, if
11 there are violations or if there are issues, we would
12 look at that whether or not we should remain in the
13 program.

14 I think it's important to say that right now, the
15 program is designed a. as a point of accessibility
16 with partners who understand and share the same
17 vision and goal that we do. It's a mix of
18 institutions of different sizes and kinds and it is
19 specifically built to make sure that there is a
20 variety and give people the option and accessibility
21 they need. However, again, after looking and
22 understanding more about the situation, we can see
23 what happens. And since we are looking at it more
24 globally of course and we work with our partners in
25 MOIA, where all of these programs go through a
thorough you know vetting to make sure that they are

3 in compliance with all the appropriate regulations,
4 federal state local and especially when it comes to
5 access in protecting peoples rights.

6 It's something we take very seriously and again,
7 because we are saying that there are teams that are
8 participating. People who are apart of this program,
9 folks will need to have to be within the bounds of
10 what's allowed.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, well, I am looking
12 forward to exploring that and really using the muscle
13 of the city to make that happen. It might just be
14 ignorance and it just requires maybe a conversation
15 and somewhat I want that to change and so let's do
16 that together.

17 Let's go back to the hotline and the hotline
18 that's gotten a lot of requests for a whole bunch of
19 things. We have been mentioning it over this
20 conversation and Director Bae, I would like to kind
21 of hear from you about the primary requests that are
22 coming in relating to housing. If you have numbers
23 on referrals that are made for HRA administered
24 housing assistance for example. HPD administered
25 housing. I want to get a sense of what is coming

3 into the hotline and what kind of types of housing
4 assistance are being asked for or connected to.

5 JEAN BAE: Yeah, definitely. Probably our
6 community service team director Eileen is right now,
7 like see, I told you I needed to get this number.
8 And so, I actually have it in front of me.

9 So, we have uhm, so we have received around 70
10 referrals in last year 2020 that is 70 inquiries
11 relating to housing or tenant protection or anything
12 relating to that. And then, this year, I think this
13 again shows you know, gravity of issues just becoming
14 more similar but we have received 74 inquiries so far
15 and given that 2021 you know only has been like we
16 just had first quarter. It just shows you know
17 inquiries increasing.

18 And sort of questions usually you know people may
19 not necessarily directly know the resources
20 themselves as you know. So, a lot of times there are
21 questions related to you know for instance, is there
22 rental arrears in public assistance? And things like
23 that that they are looking for, which is probably one
24 of the more prominent questions that we get. Or
25 concern about the landlord, legal assistance.

3 So, a lot of times for that we either refer them
4 to a Home Base program or a Fasten program depending
5 on their eligibility as well as some of the other
6 sort of cash assistance programs if they are
7 eligible. And then, and legal assistance; you know
8 HRA and OCJ implements that and you know thanks to
9 Council's hard work, we have a universal housing
10 legal assistance law. So, under that, you know they
11 can get assistance, so we refer to them on that as
12 well.

13 I think that is about I would say two-thirds if
14 not more of you know the calls that we receive sort
15 of go through that route. And then sort of the rest
16 is basically more specifically looking for actual
17 housing. You know, like access to the more secure
18 housing, which is actually about ten or so. So, like
19 it's not as many but still it's uhm, you know a
20 significant number. And for that a lot of times
21 because we have a specifically trained staff members
22 who can actually handle sort of like, knowing all the
23 specificity of these you know different housing
24 programs that I don't pretend to be an expert of.

25 And so we — and they run the tenant helpline
which also our outreach team and communications team

3 have been helping and supporting. And so, we usually
4 refer to them so the specialist can you know
5 specifically go through the scenarios and provide the
6 appropriate assistance.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And just so we can be
8 clear about this, we are talking about a tenant
9 hotline versus like an Action NYC hotline?

10 JEAN BAE: Yeah, that's the hotline that we refer
11 to but the numbers that I was talking about was of
12 the MOIA hotline which is people directly calling us
13 saying they need help from us, yes.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Got it. Got it and that's
15 a citywide hotline as well?

16 JEAN BAE: Yeah, Tenant Hotline is a citywide
17 hotline and uhm, it's managed by Mayor's Office to
18 Protect Tenants and they handle these issues
19 including you know also like they provide for
20 instance assistance to fill out the Hardship
21 Declaration to be protected under the Eviction
22 Moratorium and things like that. So, they handle a
23 comprehensive ranges of different services that
24 people need relating to housing.
25

3 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Got it. Got it. Thank
4 you for that. I have some follow-ups but we can talk
5 offline on that.

6 Moving on to really thinking about how MOIA
7 conducts outreach. Really specifically to housing
8 resources and assistance. How do you target specific
9 communities? How do you know where to target and
10 what do you do to target those communities?

11 JEAN BAE: Uhm, you know, actually one of the
12 things that Sabrina and I have been doing a lot of
13 thinking around lately is how – and we always have
14 been aware but how immigrants are not a monolithic
15 entity. Which is I think sort of what you are
16 referring to.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah.

18 JEAN BAE: That you know, within immigrant
19 communities, obviously there is always like an income
20 disparity even when we talk about for instance
21 specific like Asian immigrants you know of me being
22 part of it or like Black immigrants etc. Like, even
23 within them, there is a huge disparity as to like
24 their income, education, what kind of jobs they have.
25 And as we know, New York City a lot of times, they
live in different neighborhoods sort of like

3 congregated and that also, depending on the housing
4 stocks in those neighborhoods, that can obviously
5 create very unique housing issues that might be
6 different from others. Their culture obviously has
7 impact on that as well.

8 So, in terms of working with the outreach team, I
9 mean while we fully understand – you know, we take
10 our responsibility under the city law to not
11 discriminate against anyone based in providing
12 programs based on their national origin or you know
13 immigration status very seriously. We also fully you
14 know agree with you and think it is very important
15 that we need to know the specific needs of different
16 communities and target them.

17 And so, actually for that I think there are a
18 couple of ways that we do it. It is just most of our
19 presentations that outreach team conducts and what we
20 have done in language and this; thanks to their
21 amazing capacity of being able to speak many
22 languages. And you know in that process and also
23 they are constantly talking to different community
24 leaders and for instance, this is how we found out
25 for instance at the beginning of the pandemic sort of
more, much more heightened need relating to

1 COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS 90
3 overcrowding which also Council Member Dromm is very
4 well aware of certain South Asian communities. And
5 that was where we did very you know targeted
6 proactive outreach on the availability of COVID-19
7 hotel program and sort of the importance of social
8 distancing.

9 And so, even relating to housing, if there is
10 like you know for instance, if we see more of not
11 directly and as you are very well aware immigrants
12 may have sublease of a sublease or they may not be
13 [INAUDIBLE 1:53:45]. And that's prominent in certain
14 communities over others. And so in those cases,
15 particularly highlighting when we are doing
16 presentation that you know that that doesn't mean
17 that you don't have rights.

18 You know in fact you still have a right as a
19 tenant to not be evicted without you know due process
20 procedure. And so, those are some of the ways that
21 we are trying to do more of a like making sure that
22 we address specific needs of the communities. But we
23 would further like to collaborate with you on - I
24 know that this issue is very important to you. You
25 know we have heard through your Council staff that
this is something that you are really caring about

3 and that's something that we also would like to do
4 more work on.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Well and part of what we
6 want to get from this hearing and some follow-up from
7 this hearing is just data, raw data about numbers.
8 Funding, how time - like, there is a lot of ways we
9 could measure the focus and outreach geography.
10 There is analysis here that I think could help us at
11 the Council as the policy making machine to really
12 offer you all some ideas. But without numbers it's
13 hard and it's not impossible because you know we have
14 relationships, so we can through anecdotal response
15 we can do that.

16 We want to dig deeper with numbers. We want to
17 really understand what's happening now. Where is it
18 happening? How is it happening? And that's what we
19 are trying to do. And so, maybe this next question I
20 can get to that and really in partnership from MOIA
21 with other agencies, how do you educate housing
22 inspectors on the experiences of immigrant New
23 Yorkers because they are not a monolith. They are
24 very different and they have many issues with
25 language, all these pieces. How do you educate them
and specifically tenant harassment and immigration

3 enforcement, to ensure that there is a positive and
4 sensitive interaction between the [INAUDIBLE 1:55:47]
5 and the city person?

6 JEAN BAE: Uhm, yes, uhm, just relating to the
7 data piece, it's something that again Sabrina and I
8 are working on. It's like, you must have like
9 secretly like logged into my computer and looked at
10 our research in the priorities or something.

11 We are trying to figure out how we can sort of be
12 more sensitive to that diverse you know nature of
13 immigrant communities and you know some of the things
14 that we are thinking about are you know going more
15 specific to that.

16 Obviously, the challenges doing it in a sensitive
17 way that it doesn't stigmatize any specific
18 communities. So, it's something that we are still in
19 a very like an early stage of working on and you know
20 we would definitely love to collaborate with you and
21 you know get more input.

22 Relating to how we work with - uhm, we, as a
23 MOIA, I am being fully honest. I don't think we
24 directly work with housing inspectors. But having
25 said it, we are working with the agency. I mean, I

3 could be totally wrong. Like somebody might come
4 back to me and say that I am not doing it.

5 Yeah, I misrepresented but just in terms of
6 working with other agencies, I know for a fact that
7 and I probably am wrong now that I think about it
8 because we do work with other agencies to routinely
9 provide training on sort of like you know immigrants
10 specific fear and concern and their needs. By which
11 I mean for instance, how public charge rule has
12 effected them or whether it's relating to immigration
13 enforcement and their concern about when somebody
14 knocking on the door and you know, how that effects
15 them and things like that.

16 And you know, we have also - we have also done
17 our Know Your Rights training to immigrant
18 communities directly, so that they are also aware of
19 their rights in those kind of situations. Which a
20 lot of times you know being undocumented immigrants
21 particularly in this city a lot of times make you
22 think that you don't necessarily have any rights and
23 that you may not - you may not necessarily be able to
24 you know ask for things or challenge things or ask
25 for a lawyer and things like that.

3 And so, for us to reach to communities and
4 providing that information is really important and
5 also working with our different city agencies is
6 important. To be honest, that's actually how I
7 learned about MOIA when I was Department of Health
8 because you know, MOIA came to Department of Health
9 and have done a lot of collaboration and a lot of
10 presentations.

11 So, you know, yeah, and with that, I am going to
12 defer to HPD to see if they have anything to add.

13 AHMED TIGANI: Thank you. Our in field workforce
14 inspectors or otherwise are always given the
15 understanding that they represent the face of the
16 agency. They are our ambassadors in the world. As
17 part of their training, these are topics that are
18 woven into how they develop their approach,
19 understanding of how to carry the job day in and day
20 out.

21 There is always new information that we again
22 gather and learn from collaborations, either with
23 MOIA or from case study in the field. When it comes
24 to emergencies, that responsibility and the
25 understanding becomes even more important. We have
language access and language assistant staff who are

3 part of emergency situations when it is called for
4 and we need that cultural competency in the field.

5 So, both from a training perspective and also
6 from a resources allocation and deployment
7 perspective, we are looking at the question in normal
8 day to day housing enforcement, housing maintenance
9 code issues that we look into and also in response to
10 emergencies.

11 You know in order for us to get to the root
12 problem of what happens, people normally have to
13 communicate to us things that are happening there and
14 not easy to see inside an apartment. Leaks behind
15 the wall, issues in the neighbors apartment. And so,
16 being able to navigate those hurdles that come from
17 not being aware of being culturally upheld and
18 navigate these conversations puts us at a
19 disadvantage, which is why it is worth our time and
20 resources to put training in that regard.

21 Anne-Marie do you have anything that I am missing
22 here?

23 ANNE-MARIE HENDRICKSON: No, I don't. I think
24 you said it well.

25 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, well thank you for
that. I want to follow-up with that to that. It's

3 an area of opportunity to be not just sensitive but
4 to be held accountable at the city level that this is
5 a fresh training that is up to date. That an
6 inspector will understand that there is a Public
7 Charge rule as soon as it changes that that may come
8 up. That they are ready. You know, they are the
9 face. We are all the face of the city in some ways
10 and that interaction will rise up with issues if you
11 even get to the point where you are engaging and
12 talking. And so, okay, great thank you for that.

13 I want to move through and I am just thinking
14 about the kind of multiple issues that have happened
15 in the immigrant community and very most recently,
16 the sustained rise in anti-Asian discrimination and
17 harassment in New York City, now for more over than a
18 year now. What sensitivity trainings have been
19 required of city employees who regularly interface
20 with members of the public?

21 I am going to go back to the housing inspectors
22 because that's what we are trying to understand but
23 has anyone gotten new training, different training,
24 better training around this issue?

25 AHMED TIGANI: So, Chair, you know once again, I
wanted to – I want to repeat our state – our comments

1 and our statements. That kind of action is
2 unacceptable. We moved quickly to address the
3 situation and we made sure to reiterate to our staff
4 regardless of the inspector, any employee at the HPD
5 what the standard is and our responsibilities as
6 stewards of that standard in the city.
7

8 We will continue to look for ways to get that
9 message even further engrained in our work. As an
10 agency and especially an agency whose for the last
11 two years, over 150 meetings has worked to develop a
12 robust fair housing plan around building more equity
13 in the way we create housing and allow people to move
14 and grow in the housing network in New York.

15 We are constantly thinking of strategies outside
16 and inside. So, it requires internally our staff has
17 gone through extensive cultural awareness and equity
18 training as part of that process. And that is
19 something that how that process came out, ideas of
20 how we can better instill that in our inspector
21 training and in our staff training to be better
22 stewards of that standard.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: So, I think what I heard
24 was that and I will just repeat it back to you that
25 that is unacceptable across the board. You have a

1 standard of excellence and you are going to meet it.
2
3 What I am asking for is any additional new since we
4 have all been seeing the rise in anti-Asian sentiment
5 throughout the city. That's what I am asking for. I
6 am asking for like what you already do that we are
7 going to hold you accountable to that excellence but
8 is there anything new that you have done? And I know
9 recently there was some stuff in the press about a
10 housing inspector but is there anything new? That's
11 what I am asking about.

12 AHMED TIGANI: I can come back to you about any
13 new trainings or any adjustments or revisions to that
14 training. We have you know; I can tell you that we
15 have started by making sure that is the priority of
16 management and supervisors to spend time to address
17 this issue and make sure people understand that
18 standard. But for other kind of specifics, technical
19 changes or updates to material, I can come back to
20 you.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Please. Thank you.
22 Shortly because we really want to get a sense of it
23 and stay on top of that for every reason that I think
24 we are trying to figure out here. And especially
25 through this Committee specifically, we are really

3 interested in elevating this issue through a public
4 hearing conversation and ensuring that we can really
5 hold the city accountable to addressing that. And
6 that we think in that space is a training space
7 that's new and very specific and is done and not just
8 like referring to well, this is not who we are. It's
9 clearly not working. Let's make it better.

10 So, let's talk about - let's move over to the
11 federal stimulus. I know as being a team member, a
12 budget negotiation team member, we are all looking at
13 this and figuring out where is it going to go? And
14 we are in the middle of that negotiation but very
15 specifically, how is that money being used to ensure
16 as far as you know, both MOIA and HPD to ensure that
17 immigrant New Yorkers have equal access to affordable
18 housing? Are city testing and vaccine sites for
19 example screening housing you know and this is
20 something that I am personally working on right now.
21 We are going to be interacting with if we get it
22 right and I am hoping we do. That's the goal, to get
23 90 plus percent vaccination. We are going to be
24 seeing people go through a city government experience
25 like a vaccine and if we are not throwing everything

3 at it, like what's going on with housing and food
4 stamps? Can we re-enroll you?

5 This is an opportunity to really engage them when
6 that is now coming out and saying yes, I am talking
7 about the immigrant community who are already going
8 to have trouble. That last 25 percent is going to be
9 the hardest as we get to vaccination. This is an
10 opportunity to engage in a very positive way and
11 already you know, someone coming in already worked on
12 with trust. And maybe it's a local Council Member.
13 It's a local nonprofit that will have some kernel of
14 trust to get into that room, perfect opportunity to
15 throw this in.

16 So, are we thinking about stimulus money for this
17 and can we work together because I have some ideas on
18 how to really draw that for not just vaccine equity
19 but services equity?

20 JEAN BAE: I can start with a couple of things
21 and uhm, you know, I think where you are thinking is
22 exactly where MOIA is thinking and in fact, we have
23 been you know working really closely with the Vaccine
24 Command Center of the City Hall and sort of
25 advocating for that. You know importance of engaging
community leaders like you and like you know

3 nonprofits etc. for them to be actually - uh, to make
4 sure that you know, we gain their trust and also help
5 them gain access to vetting needed services.

6 So, for instance and especially vaccine. So,
7 with vaccine actually relating to federal funding.
8 You know, our city has been working with a lot of
9 community-based organizations who are part of the
10 Test and Trace you know CBO group that are providing
11 assistance to you know a New York City residents
12 including many immigrant communities. In fact, many
13 of them are organizations that you are very familiar
14 with that work with immigrants and undocumented
15 immigrants. And uhm, you know that was something
16 that was partly you know possible because of ability
17 to utilize federal funding and you know the fact that
18 again, you know as you know some of the - when it
19 comes to sort of more indirect access assistance, it
20 becomes a little easier to rely on federal funding.
21 And so, that was you know some of the ways that we
22 have been working on.

23 And in terms of the housing, you know you may
24 have probably said but you know federal stimulus
25 included the emergency rental assistance funding that
originally you know state government implemented like

1
2 twice with the applications period of being open
3 twice. But I think for a number of reasons just
4 being perfectly honest in terms of the exact barriers
5 that we have talked about including immigration
6 status and documentation and just the challenges that
7 people had I think, you know it still could use more
8 outreach and more assistance to be able to fully
9 allocate that funding. Which was why the city
10 stepped in and now we have an RFP available for
11 community-based organizations to be able to provide
12 sort of assistance to the community members directly,
13 so that they can access this fund.

14 Which they obviously as we know really need given
15 the sort of rental crisis that we have in this city
16 right now. And so, those are sort of the two big
17 ways that I can think of and you know everything
18 pretty much all of the MOIA program. Partly because
19 we are not necessarily a huge agency but also partly
20 because we really, really highly value our
21 partnership with the community-based organizations.
22 So, all of the program that we lead or we have had a
23 very significant role on like Fasten, you know is
24 done through CBO's and I think HPD also is on the

3 same sort of way link as well on that. Which was why
4 that program worked out that way.

5 And so, that's I think how we really tried to
6 make sure that you know, we can sort of meet
7 immigrants where they are there. And by the way, I
8 am quoting you and you are like hearing three times -
9 three hearings ago or something. I wasn't lying when
10 I said I was here you know all the time.

11 And so, I think that's sort of yeah, the approach
12 that we have been taking together and I will let
13 Ahmed talk more with any other additional housing
14 assistance related comments that he has.

15 AHMED TIGANI: Thank you. I think you said it
16 well. All our partners on the ground, whether it is
17 for proactive, proactive inspections or any of our
18 other organizations that we run around tenant
19 harassment. Where we work with groups, we are also
20 talking to those groups about whether the wrap around
21 services they are providing. Whether or not it is
22 something that we can be involved and support and if
23 needed. Many of them are savvy and don't need this
24 assistance but from time to time they will need help
25 bridging connections to other city agencies. That's
what we are here to do.

3 As you know behind the scenes, we are constantly
4 as a government meeting together to make sure how we
5 are leveraging every opportunity, piggybacking off
6 each other, each other's events. We are using our
7 shared social media and communication platforms to
8 talk about these things like making sure that New
9 Yorkers get vaccinated regardless of what the issue
10 topic is. Because we know that at any point, as I
11 said earlier, people are living you know tremendously
12 difficult lives. They are navigating and we have an
13 opportunity to capture their attention, that's when
14 you need to get the word out.

15 I also just wanted to take a step back and
16 affirmatively say that on your question about
17 trainings, they are being refreshed due to the
18 situations going on with things that are happening so
19 that we make sure those lessons, especially for our
20 inspectors are there and present and engrained and of
21 course we will continue to come back to you with more
22 specifics. But wanted you to know that
23 affirmatively, trainings are being furnished.

24 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: That's great to hear,
25 thank you. Thank you for that and I think what I
want to - I just want to say and this is my final

3 question and I am really looking forward to hearing
4 from the advocates and maybe even really kind of
5 hearing from them and not just on the approach ideas
6 on what is happening right now but in response to
7 what they heard from you all today.

8 And if there are any gaps in that experience that
9 we find those gaps and fix them but I know that just
10 through my work in the last year, this is something
11 that I am talking to the team about. There are a lot
12 of separate - separate from the assistance that we
13 are getting directly from the city that the Mayor
14 will have the opportunity to propose spending and the
15 Council will have to approve that spending through
16 our budget negotiations. There are separate pots of
17 money or nationally through - there is national money
18 coming from the federal government to help city's
19 fight vaccine equity.

20 And I think - is MOIA connected to those
21 conversations in drawing some of that money through
22 the Department of Health and I would like to get in
23 on that conversation to really help think through
24 this. Language access is everything to vaccine
25 equity and I think this Committee has the opportunity
to really inform those applications, especially when

1 we are talking about like 20 plus billion dollars
2 that are going nationally. I want to be able to
3 influence that and can we do that?
4

5 JEAN BAE: So, there are multiple things that I
6 can refer to. One is that you know, there has been
7 an RFP that was issued by the federal government that
8 was sort of seeking you know vaccine equity outreach
9 work and we have been in touch with Department of
10 Health. I think, my understanding is they you know,
11 have submitted their own application and sort of
12 making sure that that is you know like.

13 And the thing about DOHMH and you know I came
14 from there is that we have very close relationships
15 that they fully understand, particularly the people
16 that I work with. The importance of sort of you know
17 like addressing certain barriers, immigrant specific
18 issues in designing program. And so, that's
19 something that's very much on their mind.

20 And I think sort of in terms of the work, yeah,
21 and so the work that it's doing with the CBO's and
22 relating to the federal fund things. We do work -
23 from MOIA's perspective, we work in both ways. One
24 is working with the agencies to make sure that we can
25 influence the way that they are doing their

3 operation. You know, it's not just about in fact,
4 you know outreach to communities that are being left
5 out right but it is you know beyond that in terms of
6 access.

7 Like, you know what are the things that we see
8 that are not being addressed on sites. So, whether
9 it's language access issues or whether it is the fact
10 that on FEMA's site, we have military people standing
11 outside or that you know, where is the documentation
12 issues. Although it is now less of a burden when you
13 know people have to show their employment status, the
14 challenges they have and so, you know from there we
15 have had a very collaborative relationship trying to
16 come up with alternatives that we could negotiate
17 with the state to be able to you know utilize.

18 Whether it is things for day laborers or some of the
19 other people who you know delivery workers and other
20 people who may have a really challenging time finding
21 an employers or getting an employer's letter because
22 of their immigration status. Like, can a nonprofit
23 who worked with them can you know basically attest to
24 their employment status and things like that.

25 So, that's the work that we continue to do and
will be doing especially as they are now thinking

1 about sort of you know with the bigger funding,
2 federal funding coming in. Thinking about sort of
3 more proactive outreach and the work they are doing
4 and then the other part is sort of really you know
5 again, knowing that community-based organizations are
6 the voice of the communities. Like making sure that
7 they are plugged into the dialogue that's happening
8 at a high level with whether it is other government
9 agencies or even with the federal.
10

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Right.

12 JEAN BAE: You know government agencies like
13 CDC's for them to have an opportunity to actually
14 have a direct discussion. So, we always you know
15 recommend the organizations. We always you know like
16 try to provide the information about such
17 opportunities so that you know they can really raise
18 the voice about what's going on on the ground.
19 Because you know, I am talking to you about this
20 issue now but I also fully, fully admit that I am
21 just right now sitting in my home and may not
22 necessarily fully understand what's going on — on
23 each of the sites or each of the communities that our
24 organizers are you know door knocking on or providing
25 a flyer on.

3 So, those are some of the approaches that we are
4 taking and sort of yeah, relating to more specific
5 housing part, I would defer to HPD. Sorry, Ahmed, I
6 feel like I keep like just -

7 AHMED TIGANI: No, this is the work that we enjoy
8 and we are excited to do. We are excited to work
9 with our partners on the ground to do this and you
10 know with the federal stimulus money when regards to
11 outreach and working with partners in Department of
12 Health is we are you know working with both the
13 Department of Health and working with the Vax Command
14 Center to figure out ways through us, information
15 about how to get people details regarding
16 opportunities to get vaccinated, flexibility and the
17 options to be eligible. And this gets back to a core
18 issue that you mentioned in the beginning, there was
19 an inherent fear and distrust and this is a
20 government program. People are feeling cagey or they
21 are offput and so, we are trying to break down those
22 barriers by working with the CBO's on the ground.

23 And there is no city agency at this point that
24 doesn't have a responsibility in getting the word out
25 about vaccinations. Whatever our primary goal and

3 primary mission that's one. Number two, we are all
4 vaccination hub ambassadors.

5 So, our communications team is working hard at
6 figuring out how we weave that into the various news
7 letters that go out. Our folks on the ground are
8 talking to the CBO's that we work with. Again, a
9 large portion of those relationships come from you
10 know the amazing contribution the Council does every
11 year in discretionary funds \$11 million. 80 CBO's
12 alone in that group, funding their work, helping them
13 go further and reaching out to people. We will bring
14 to the table whatever government resources we can so
15 that they can do that work. Information, bringing
16 them at the higher level of the conversation.

17 So, again, I see primary, we are doing the
18 mission of HPD but we are all vaccination ambassadors
19 right now.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, well, I want to
21 follow-up and maybe specifically with you Director
22 Bae, specifically on the DOH work and the city coming
23 up with an ultimate plan. I want to believe that
24 they understand but to your point, I think there is
25 always an opportunity for us to help shape what that
looks like and I have some very specific ideas that

3 are coming from the community that we can kind of
4 build into it since there is a lot - I mean the
5 federal government is throwing money at us. In the
6 country to solve the equity issue for the vaccine
7 that can really help us build platforms for an
8 infrastructure for the future. Future vaccine need
9 and also all this other stuff that the city needs to
10 get done.

11 So, that's how I am coming in on it and we are
12 going to be hearing from the advocates next. Thank
13 you so much for your patience to all the
14 organizations that are testifying and people in the
15 public. And I just want to get a confirmation from
16 both of you that you will have somebody on this call.
17 You know, my preference but not required is that they
18 are on camera but if not, I just want to know who is
19 going to stay if it is not you for the rest of the
20 testimony.

21 JEAN BAE: So, I wasn't kidding when I said I was
22 at most of your hearings all the time from the
23 beginning until the end. So, I am going to stay as
24 much as possible. I don't know how much longer it
25 will go but definitely, I will be here at least until
two o'clock I believe and then we have our two

3 fellows, Dafni and Marco who have been diligently
4 sort of you know I think sending notes to different
5 people. We will definitely on and continuing to get
6 monitored there.

7 You are not going to be seeing their name because
8 they didn't necessarily get Zoom links, so they are
9 watching it through live stream but they will -

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: I see.

11 JEAN BAE: Yeah, they will definitely be there and
12 you know I will be there as long as possible.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay and Sergeant of Arms,
14 if we need to bring them on so they can take notes as
15 an official capacity, I will recommend that but I
16 don't know how that will work. And then HPD, what
17 uhm -

18 AHMED TIGANI: I will be continuing to listen so
19 I won't be on camera and also, I will be joined by
20 and I am joined now by Jordan Gibbons from our Office
21 of Intergovernmental Affairs, who will be here for
22 the duration of the hearing as well.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Well beautiful. Thank you
24 so much for your time this morning, now in afternoon
25 and I will hand it back to our Committee Counsel
Harbani Ahuja.

3 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much Chair. I
4 am just confirming that there are no other questions
5 from Council Members at this time.

6 Seeing no hands, I am going to thank this panel
7 for their testimony. At this time, we have concluded
8 administration testimony and we will be moving onto
9 public testimony. I would like to remind everyone
10 that we will be calling on individuals one by one to
11 testify and each panelist will be given three minutes
12 to speak.

13 For panelists, after I call your name, a member of
14 our staff will unmute you. There may be a few
15 seconds of delay before you are unmuted and we thank
16 you in advance for your patience.

17 Please wait a brief moment for the Sergeant at
18 Arms to announce that you may begin before starting
19 your testimony. Council Members who have questions
20 for a particular panelist should use the Zoom raise
21 hand function and I will call on you after the panel
22 has completed their testimony in the order in which
23 you have raised your hands.

24 I would like to now welcome our first public
25 panel to testify. In order, I will be calling on
26 Aura Mejia followed by Trisha Sobha followed by

3 Sheena Kang followed by Yamilka Mena followed by
4 Leslie Ann Caraballo followed by Alexandra Dougherty
5 followed by Alma Arias.

6 Aura Mejia, you may begin when you are ready.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time begins.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Aura, we can't hear you.

9 SERGEANT AT ARMS: You have to accept the unmute.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: It looks like she did
11 accept it.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Uh, there we go. Let's try it
13 again.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay, we will circle back to
15 you. I am going to now call on Trisha Sobha. You
16 may begin when you are ready.

17 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Clocks ready.

18 TRISHA SOBHA: Good afternoon. Thank you Chair
19 Menchaca and Chair Cornegy and the Committees on
20 Immigration and Housing and Buildings for holding
21 this hearing on this important issue.

22 My name is Trisha Sobha and I am a Staff Attorney
23 at Mobilization for Justice. Where we provide legal
24 assistance to low-income New Yorkers in a wide range
25 of areas including in immigration and housing
26 matters.

3 I would like to address today why DRIE should be
4 expanded to include immigrant New Yorkers who are
5 currently excluded. DRIE allows people with
6 disabilities to remain in their home and communities
7 with dignity. DRIE greatly minimizes the risk of
8 people with disabilities becoming homeless or
9 unnecessarily institutionalized in hospitals or
nursing homes.

10 To be eligible for DRIE, the applicant is
11 required to prove their disability through receiving
12 a federally funded disability income program. As
13 mentioned today, due to immigration status, certain
14 immigrants including undocumented immigrants are
15 ineligible for these forms of disability payments and
16 therefore cannot qualify for DRIE, only because of
17 their immigration status. Providing no other
18 alternatives to prove their disability is not only
19 unacceptable but also discrimination based on
20 immigration status.

21 Expanding DRIE to immigrant New Yorkers, many who
22 have been the hardest hit by COVID-19 in New York is
23 more important now than ever. Many have lost their
24 jobs or are subject to discrimination and unfair
25 wages because of their immigration status.

3 Therefore, having to pay increasing rent has become
4 even more difficult for them. This will undoubtedly
5 lead to homelessness and placement in the shelter
6 system or unnecessarily institutionalization in
7 facilities like nursing homes but have been plagued
8 by COVID-19 over the past year.

9 It is time to expand DRIE to immigrant New
10 Yorkers who are currently excluded. It is time to
11 stop the unfair and undeniable discrimination based
12 on someone's immigration status. Expanding DRIE to
13 immigrant New Yorkers would allow them to stay in
14 their homes and would also be saving New York City
15 money by avoiding an increase in placement in the
16 shelter system, hospitals or nursing homes.

17 I believe legislative fixes are possible and that
18 there are solutions where immigrants can be included
19 and heard. By taking the necessary steps to include
20 immigrants in DRIE, where we would be on the way to
21 ensuring that no New Yorker is left behind and that
22 they receive the benefits they qualify for regardless
23 of their immigration status.

24 I would like to thank Senator Rivera and Assembly
25 Member Gonzalez Rojas for their leadership on this
very important issue. I would also like to thank

3 Council Member Dromm for his leadership in the New
4 York City Council on this issue.

5 Thank you all for your time and for allowing me
6 to testify today on behalf of the community I am so
7 honored to serve every day.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
9 I would like to now welcome Sheena Kang to testify.
10 You may begin when you are ready.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Clock is ready.

12 SHEENA KANG: Good morning. My name is Sheena
13 Kang. Thank you Chair Menchaca and Chair Cornegy and
14 the Committees for holding this hearing and thank you
15 for allowing me to testify today.

16 I am a Senior Policy Analyst at Citizens Housing
17 and Planning Council or CHPC. CHPC is a nonprofit,
18 research and education organization focused on
19 improving housing, policy and planning in New York
20 City to improve the lives of all New Yorkers.

21 CHPC is in full support of the Preconsidered
22 Resolution and we thank Council Member Dromm for
23 bringing it forward. Countless barriers in the
24 workforce and housing market make it more difficult
25 for foreign born New Yorkers to find and maintain
high quality housing that they can afford. Obstacles

1
2 like these tend to be even greater for residents
3 whose immigration status precludes them from
4 qualifying for federal aid.

5 For example, the median earnings of undocumented
6 New Yorkers in 2018 was only \$29,000 compared to
7 \$49,000 for U.S. Born workers. On top of these
8 issues, over 200,000 New Yorkers face the additional
9 challenges of working and maintaining housing and
10 living with a disability.

11 So, excluding these especially vulnerable
12 individuals from DRIE, limits the programs impacts
13 and also runs counter to its goals. It hurts not
14 only disabled immigrant New Yorkers who would
15 otherwise qualify for the program but also their
16 children and dependents.

17 Over one in eight New Yorkers lives in a mixed
18 status household including 260,000 children who are
19 overwhelmingly U.S. born citizens themselves. Too
20 often as policy makers and planners, we overlook the
21 fact that 38 percent of residents and 44 percent of
22 workers in New York City are foreign born. And when
23 our policies fail to consider the unique needs and
24 challenges that these New Yorkers face, we both
25

3 reinforce inequality and risk detrimental losses for
4 the city over all.

5 Immigration has always been a key driving force
6 of our population and economic growth. So, now more
7 than ever, as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic,
8 we need to ensure that New York remains an attractive
9 place for new immigrants and a place where all
10 immigrants have ample opportunities to succeed.

11 I would like to share with you that last year
12 CHPC released a report entitled Housing Plan for a
13 City of Immigrants, to explore the ways that housing
14 policy can help meet these goals.

15 In line with the Preconsidered Resolution today,
16 the report recommends expanding access to crucial
17 public benefits, such as emergency rental assistance
18 to households of all immigration statuses. And many
19 of the other solutions we propose resonate with some
20 of the other really important issues that were
21 brought up today. Such as eliminating barriers for
22 immigrant households to the city's affordable housing
23 lotteries and creating a regulatory framework for the
24 development of safe and high quality SRO's.

25 So, we hope that you will find this paper and
CHPC in general as a resource.

1 COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH THE
2 COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS

120

3 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

4 SHEENA KANG: In this discussion and we look
5 forward to working with you on these issues moving
6 forward. Thank you so much.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.
8 I would like to now welcome Yamilka Mena to testify.
9 You may begin when you are ready.

10 YAMILKA MENA: Good afternoon.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Clock is ready.

12 YAMILKA MENA: My name is Yamilka Mena and I am
13 the Director of Immigration Initiatives at the
14 Hispanic Federation. The nation's premier Latino and
15 nonprofit membership organization. I would like to
16 thank Chairs Menchaca, Cornegy and all the Committee
17 members for bringing us together to discuss the
18 housing disparities that immigrant New Yorkers
19 continue to face.

20 I am going to cut down my testimony so that I
21 won't repeat what has already been said with regard
22 to the impact on the pandemic that has been had on
23 immigrants and housing disparities. I think Mr.
24 Bravo and Mr. Cortez and my colleagues on this panel
25 have done a great job on summarizing the issues and
the data.

3 What we want to talk about is sustainability. We
4 know that the disproportionate impact on immigrants,
5 especially undocumented immigrants is far reaching as
6 has intersected all areas such as health, economy,
7 education and importantly housing. These issues have
8 been perpetuated more during the pandemic where
9 immigrant communities who make up a lot of the
10 essential workforce have been left out of federal
11 aid.

12 With the passage of the Excluded Workers Fund, we
13 can see that there is capacity to support the
14 undocumented community. However, we know that
15 although a huge win, the fund is not sustainable.
16 Expanding DRIE and creating a similar eligibility
17 model as the SCRIE program can be a great step toward
18 ensuring the undocumented, disabled immigrant
19 community has access to important benefits that will
20 keep them in their homes, especially during these
21 unprecedented times.

22 New York City has to acknowledge and address the
23 inequities of the COVID-19 response toward immigrants
24 by first adopting this Preconsidered Resolution to
25 expand access to DRIE including undocumented
immigrants. Expanding the commitment of the city

3 funding toward emergency cash assistance programs to
4 continue addressing the unprecedented economic
5 challenges still faced by immigrant New Yorkers
6 particularly with rent assistance. Emphasizing the
7 distribution of multilingual community updates
8 pertaining to the ever changing status of eviction
9 protections and current NYC Tenant Rights. And
10 finally, supporting continued expansion of Food
11 Pantry, all city feeding programs and increasing food
12 allowances for emergency housing programs.

13 Thank you for your time. The Hispanic Federation
14 is committed to working with the New York City
15 Council and colleagues to continue to protect
16 immigrant New Yorkers during the COVID-19 pandemic
17 towards inequitable recovery.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
19 testimony. I would like to now welcome Leslie Ann
20 Caraballo to testify. You may begin when you are
21 ready.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Clock is ready.

23 LESLIE ANN CARABALLO: Thank you Council Members
24 for holding this hearing today and for affording me
25 an opportunity to speak. My name is Leslie Ann
Caraballo, I am proud to represent the Legal Aid

3 Society where I am a Practicing Law Graduate with the
4 Civil Housing Practice.

5 I will submit written testimony which I hope the
6 Council members will read after this hearing but I
7 will briefly address some points now.

8 The Legal Aid Society was founded in 1876 to
9 provide legal assistance to low-income German
10 immigrants. Our client-based quickly expanded to a
11 diverse clients of New Yorkers from 37 countries.

12 Excuse me, I am sorry. Uh, for 145 years we have
13 remained true to that legacy as tireless advocates
14 for the most vulnerable New Yorkers. Yet, despite
15 our best efforts, the housing disparity remains. It
16 is our undocumented neighbors that today have been a
17 brunt of this lasting inequity.

18 As was discussed earlier, although documented New
19 Yorkers are significant contributors to the city
20 economy, they have significantly lower earnings than
21 U.S. Born New Yorkers and yet, they carry a higher
22 rent burden and face higher, substantially higher
23 overcrowding rates. They also face unique barriers
24 in finding and keeping homes. Undocumented clients
25 are often constrained by apartment applications,
which was mentioned by MOIA earlier. In that they

1
2 require specific forms of ID including Social
3 Security numbers.

4 They may lack credit history and are often unable
5 to provide proof of income due to informal employment
6 arrangements. This makes undocumented tenants more
7 vulnerable to unscrupulous landlords and neighbors
8 who may explore their circumstances and threaten to
9 call ICE.

10 As such, they often are afraid to seek assistance
11 from authorities when experiencing substandard living
12 conditions. But by far, the biggest barrier to
13 bridging the housing gap for undocumented New Yorkers
14 is the lack of government assistance. They are
15 largely ineligible for means tested housing programs
16 and the rules wholly exclude entirely undocumented
17 families and can render unaffordable otherwise
18 affordable housing families with mixed immigration
19 status.

20 We know that undocumented New Yorkers were
21 disproportionately effected by the pandemic and that
22 immigrant workers were more susceptible to job loss
23 due to pandemic closures, yet they are ineligible for
24 unemployment benefits and were largely excluded from
25 federal stimulus relief.

3 Many of our clients are enmeshed in nonpayment
4 cases due to a loss of income as a result of the
5 pandemic. These are our most difficult cases as
6 there are few if any options for addressing high rent
7 arrears accrued during the pandemic. Applicants must
8 show proof of income and a future ability to pay
9 ongoing rent to receive a one shot deal from HRA.

10 Undocumented clients are often unable to provide
11 such documentation due to the informal nature of
12 their unemployment. One of my clients Mr. X I will
13 call him, applied several times for a one shot but
14 was repeatedly denied. HRA told him that he would
15 otherwise be approved if he could just show his proof
16 of income, unfortunately his employer refused to
17 write the letter due to the informal nature of his
18 work.

19 Mr. X is a single dad with a daughter.

20 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

21 LESLIE ANN CARABALLO: I respectfully just ask
22 for one minute to conclude. Another client is a
23 restaurant worker only working about one day a week.
24 And yet another client is a house cleaner and people
25 have stop utilizing services. She has two children
at home.

3 None of these clients are eligible for one shots.

4 The only lifeline that has been available to them is
5 the Fasten Grant. While we are heartened that the
6 new emergency rental assistance programs will be
7 available to undocumented individuals, we strongly
8 encourage prompt and efficient administration of
9 these resources with a particular emphasis on
10 outreach and accessibility, language barriers, lack
11 of access to technology are significant obstacles in
12 our work and for our clients. And have been
13 particularly challenging during this pandemic.

14 While we look forward to this rent release, we
15 have to acknowledge that we need, desperately need
16 solid city and state funded mechanisms. Excuse me,
17 we support Council Member Dromm's Resolution calling
18 on the state legislature to pass the DRIE eligibility
19 expansion. And we also, support Initiatives like the
20 Housing Access Voucher program championed by State
21 Senator Brian Kavanagh. And New York deems itself a
22 sanctuary city. We acknowledge the right to housing
23 but we are doing little in a way of refuge for most
24 of our vulnerable contributors to our society and we
25 have to ask how much longer shall these essential
community members wait. How much more shall they

3 endure before they are recognized for their
4 contributions and offered an opportunity to obtain a
5 stable and affordable place to call home.

6 Thank you for your time and consideration.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
8 testimony. I would like to now welcome Alexandra
9 Dougherty to testify. You may begin when you are
10 ready.

11 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Clock is ready.

12 ALEXANDRA DOUGHERTY: Hi, good afternoon. My
13 name is Alexandra Dougherty. I am a Senior Staff
14 Attorney and Policy Counsel of the Civil Justice
15 Practice for Brooklyn Defender Services.

16 I would like to thank the Committees on
17 Immigration and Housing and Buildings for giving us
18 opportunity to testify today. I am here to express
19 our strong support for expanding eligibility for
20 housing benefits and subsidies for New York City's
21 immigrant residents.

22 Faced with dwindling supply of affordable
23 housing, many immigrant New Yorkers are barred from
24 accessing the federal, state and local benefits that
25 would help them secure stable housing. As you have
heard today already, many are also barred from the

3 so-called formal housing market because landlords
4 routinely require excessive documentation, much of
5 which is nearly impossible to obtain without
6 citizenship or certain legal status. Without
7 traditional documentation or identification, New
8 Yorkers are stuck without a viable pathway to access
9 housing, employment, credit and they are forced to
10 resort to informal and unsafe housing arrangements.

11 Undocumented New Yorkers are at particular risk
12 of harassment and discrimination. As you know, the
13 unpredictable changes to immigration policy
14 throughout the Trump Administration stoked fear and
15 uncertainty in immigrant communities and changes to
16 the Public Charge Rule for example. Even though they
17 are no longer in effect, we see that the chilling
18 effects persist and many of our clients are still
19 afraid to use public programs even if they are
20 eligible, that help them meet basic needs.

21 And the COVID pandemic has exacerbated these
22 existing housing problems for our immigrant clients
23 particularly. Many were already afraid of illegal
24 evictions and hesitant to assert their rights in
25 housing court but the pandemic has added job loss,

3 food insecurity and escalating landlord harassment to
4 that housing uncertainty.

5 Without access to benefits and programs aimed at
6 direct financial assistance or at cancelling rent,
7 clients who are already in unstable living situations
8 will face self help evictions now while courts or
9 closed or they will be evicted in hold over
10 proceedings when landlords realize that they can't
11 pay their back rent or access housing subsidies and
12 benefits.

13 EDS supports the Resolution calling on the state
14 to expand eligibility for SCRIE and DRIE as an
15 important first step. But these are narrow programs
16 and the change would actually effect few if any of
17 our clients. So, beyond asking the state legislature
18 to act, the city should also take action itself to
19 ensure that all New Yorkers regardless of immigration
20 status have access to safe and affordable permanent
21 housing.

22 Specifically, we recommend expanding eligibility
23 for City FHEPS regardless of public assistance
24 eligibility or immigration status and we are broadly
25 exploring and considering more kinds of direct rent
subsidy programs, specifically for immigrant tenants.

3 The city could also replicate the structure of
4 the SCRIE and DRIE program and provide tax abatements
5 to landlords who freeze the rent of low-income
6 tenants. There is no reason this type of program has
7 to be limited to disabled and senior New Yorkers and
8 rent regulated apartments.

9 We also recommend that the city expand
10 eligibility for supportive housing services so that
11 our most vulnerable residents remain connected to the
12 treatment and stability that they need.

13 So, I will direct the committees to our written
14 testimony which has more detailed comments and
15 recommendations and thank you so much for your time.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
17 testimony. I would now like to welcome Alma Arias to
18 testify. You may begin when you are ready.

19 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Clock is ready.

20 ALMA ARIAS: Good afternoon Chair Powers, Council
21 Members and staff of the Committees on Immigration
22 and on Buildings and Housing.

23 My name is Alma Arias and I am the Outreach and
24 Benefits Coordinator at Translatinx Network. And
25 today I am here to speak on the housing disparities
faced by many immigrants and how the disability or

3 rent increase exception DRIE program can truly help
4 this awfully neglected community reach absolute
5 safety and prosperity.

6 First I want to take this opportunity to thank
7 both Chairpersons Menchaca and Cornegy for allowing
8 this necessary and crucial dialogue to take place.
9 As an organization led by and serving the TGNCNB LGBTQ
10 population, I for one being a transwoman myself,
11 additionally immigrant communities, including every
12 other intersection that exists between both.

13 Here in New York City, our unwavering aim is to
14 contribute to the absolute access of our community to
15 many of the resources and opportunities that are too
16 often denied from.

17 In turn, not only will this access of resources
18 improve their lives in astronomical ways, we believe
19 it will ultimately empower and bolster future
20 generations of TGNCNB LGBTQ and immigrant communities
21 in American society at large.

22 According to Coalition for the Homeless, along
23 with the Black community, Latino Latinx New Yorkers
24 are disproportionately effected by homelessness.
25 Representing 32 percent which almost reaches half of
homeless people in the city. Additionally, according

3 to a general population study recently published in
4 May of 2020 by UCLA Williams Institute, 17 percent of
5 sexually minority adults report having experienced
6 homelessness in their lifetime.

7 All these numbers are especially alarming for us
8 given that one, this number does not even begin to
9 accurately report the many more people who go
10 unreported due to being undocumented. And two, while
11 we served immigrants from different nationalities,
12 the Hispanic Latinx community is demographically by
13 far representing higher numbers.

14 Immigrant communities undeniably face many of the
15 challenges and barriers some of us privileged
16 citizens simply do not. Such as discrimination,
17 language disparities, lower access to healthcare due
18 to lower paying jobs without benefits and an increase
19 in housing cost of living. All just because of their
20 immigration status among many other things.

21 These issues often times lead to deeper
22 ramifications. In turn become more unbearably
23 compounded with more complex issues involving mental
24 health challenges. In our experience, we have seen
25 how the intersection of all these challenges greatly
effects the immigrant community in New York. In

1 particular, those with disabilities and chronical
2 medical conditions.
3

4 Many of our community members at Translatinx
5 Network are in the process of obtaining legal
6 immigration status and this consequently means that
7 they cannot have access to many of the benefits –

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

9 ALMA ARIAS: Living conditions. Given all of the
10 aforementioned, providing access to programs like
11 DRIE would prevent many of our community members from
12 continuing to experience homelessness involving prey
13 to the ever increasing issue of mental health in our
14 country.

15 We believe it is within the American fabric, your
16 collective duty and our bound responsibility to truly
17 uphold a brave and dignified space for our sanctuary
18 city, our communities and our people. Thank you.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
20 testimony. I am now going to circle back to Aura
21 Mejia. You may begin when you are ready.

22 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Clock is ready.

23 AURA MEJIA: Hi, good afternoon everybody and
24 thank you for inviting me today. Can you hear me?

25 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes.

3 AURA MEJIA: Great, thank you. My name is Aura
4 Mejia and I am an attending Advocate and Organizer at
5 Neighbors Helping Neighbors in Sunset Park Brooklyn.
6 A great part of my work is to assist tenants facing
7 eviction, organize and provide education and tenant
8 rights in connecting with the city and state
9 companies.

10 I work mainly with an undocumented community that
11 face harassment, lack of repairs, eviction on a daily
12 basis. And during the pandemic, tenants also were
13 facing new challenges with their health, losing
14 family members and losing their jobs.

15 Extending SCRIE and DRIE and rental assistance
16 will keep tenants in their home. The majority of our
17 community undocumented members were working cleaning
18 houses, small restaurants, babysitting and we cannot
19 forget street vendors that have been under attack.

20 All of the hardworking immigrants have been
21 struggling to bring food to the table and pay their
22 rent without unemployment benefits or other benefits.

23 Mostly, all the families will be facing eviction
24 at the end of the moratorium in May and landlords
25 will be able to start eviction process for nonpayment

1 cases. Not qualify for any benefits or any
2 assistance as a one shot deal.
3

4 I am here today to ask you to pass and include
5 the hardworking families and disabled families from
6 all communities and pass funding's as SCRIE and DRIE
7 that will include and protect them from eviction.
8 And avoid adding up numbers of homeless population in
9 New York City. Prevention is essential. Housing is
10 a human right. You have the power to treat with
11 respect and dignity and provide protection to hard
12 working community members that have been invisible
13 and the most impacted by the pandemic. Or people
14 cannot afford to move out of New York City. Think
15 about undocumented families mental health and how it
16 is going to effect children and their education to.
17 Having a place to call home is for the mental for our
18 children and disabled family members. It is time to
19 do the right thing.

20 I am asking you to please pass and extend the
21 funding's for Maria and her husband and her two
22 daughters that lost their income. For Lucy and her
23 daughter and her granddaughter with only one income.
24 For Suzanna's I am with no income my two children.
25 For Veronica only working two days with two children

3 and her mother. Esperanza with her sick child and
4 only working two days. For Teresa working three
5 days, family members that lost half of their income.

6 I could go on with different names that I see and
7 I get the phone calls every day asking for help.
8 Especially undocumented tenants that are disabled and
9 they can not afford any other increases. So, I am
10 asking you to please consider them and help them.
11 Thank you very much.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

13 AURA MEJIA: Thank you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you so much for your
15 testimony. I would like to now turn it back to Chair
16 Menchaca for any questions.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Harbani and I
18 want to say thank you to this panel. I think what I
19 learned from this panel is and really it's a
20 confirmation of what the city needs to do to ensure
21 the protections. One, as we hit the May 1st
22 deadline. The impending lawsuit or just the kind of
23 legal battles that are in front of us and that the
24 income that is needed by so many immigrant families
25 is real and that's something that the city can do and
I know that there is a piece of legislation that we

3 have to ensure passes at the state to allow us to
4 bring that kind of immediate resource at the state
5 level. So, the state can give us access and grant us
6 permission to create benefit programs like cash
7 assistance and we can make that happen.

8 So, I guess my question and maybe one, you know
9 not to create repeating statements of support but I
10 want to talk about that cash assistance need as we
11 think about access to housing and how important is
12 cash assistance versus some of the other things that
13 we are talking about. Like, lawyers and programs
14 that allow affordable housing, changing some of the
15 lottery issues.

16 Cash assistance is not something that we do
17 plentiful, it's on a massive robust program but can
18 be if we need it. I don't know if Aura you want to
19 start and or who else brought it up? I think Legal
20 Aid Society brought it up as well. Is there anybody
21 that wants to speak to the importance of cash
22 assistance?

23 AURA MEJIA: I think cash assistance is very
24 important but one of the things two is the fear that
25 people that want's to apply for immigrant status, how
it is going to affect them on their application.

3 So, it's always also that fear from the community
4 that any program that children will – or their
5 benefit, that will affect them in the future.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And you are referring to
7 public charge?

8 AURA MEJIA: Public charge hmm, hmm.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Right, right and I think
10 what I am saying too is that the state legislation
11 will allow us to be able to do that without impact
12 and how do we continue to build programs that can
13 help immigrants without impacting the public charge
14 rule?

15 Does anybody else have any specific responses to
16 the cash assistance program or concept? Leslie Ann?

17 LESLIE ANN CARABALLO: Yeah, I can say thank you,
18 I rushed a little bit. There were so many good
19 points raised earlier by everyone but that is really
20 the need that I am seeing as an attorney. As I
21 mentioned, those that do not have access to one shot
22 deals, really don't have any other option. We are
23 really looking forward to this federal rent relief
24 that's coming through but it is not here yet. And
25 until that happens, people, I have clients that I
really – those are the cases that keep me up at night

3 because they have no other options unless they get
4 Fasten Grant funds, I don't know how their arrears
5 will be paid. And furthermore, you know with the
6 slow reopening, we have no knowledge of when people
7 are going to be fully back to work.

8 As Aura mentioned with all of her clients and all
9 of the names that she mentioned, nobody knows when
10 they are going to get back to work and what we have
11 is a situation where people are working one day a
12 week, two days a week.

13 Without the income moving forward, the
14 eligibility – the ability to pay rent going forward,
15 that's like this you know elephant that's kind of
16 hanging over us even when we do get the funds to
17 address the arrears, how do these New Yorkers pay
18 their rent going forward and stay housed?

19 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Awesome thank you and if
20 Legal Aid and anybody else on this call wants to join
21 us, please reach out on this specific – I also
22 believe that cash assistance is going to be really
23 critical to get the stabilization on the housing side
24 set in motion. And in addition to the legal
25 assistance, in addition to Know Your Rights, in
addition to all these other pieces. But I want to

3 ensure that we are moving in the right direction and
4 that's going to be in partnership with all of you.

5 So, Leslie Ann, if you can reach out to us
6 afterwards, I want to work with you and anybody else
7 on the call about how to build something that is
8 good. That anticipates issues, like Aura would have
9 said, Public Charge to ensure that doesn't trip over
10 certain things that will make it harder for other
11 benefits. And so, this is something I strongly
12 believe in as well.

13 With that, if there are any other Council Members
14 that want to ask questions. If not, then we can go
15 to the next panel.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. I would
17 like to ask if any Council Members have questions?
18 At this time, you can use the Zoom raise hand
19 function.

20 Seeing no other hands. Uhm, I would like to
21 thank this panel for their testimony. Uhm, at this
22 point, we have concluded our public testimony. If we
23 have inadvertently missed anyone that has registered
24 to testify today and has yet to be called, please use
25 the Zoom raise hand function now and you will be
called on in the order that your hand is raised.

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

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Wonderful, thank you. I
6 want to thank Fabian and Mario for coming and
7 starting us off with their very powerful testimony
8 about how their families are being impacted. Their
9 families are being supported by so many people on
10 this call. Families like theirs, immigrant
11 communities that have been essential workers keeping
12 the city alive, are only asking for a sense of
13 dignity and real dignity and response from the city.
14 These are taxpaying immigrant workers in our city and
15 they deserve that kind of respect. And I hope that
16 this joint hearing with Chair Cornegy and the
17 Resolution that is before us really helps shift the
18 discussion to some action items. And I know that we
19 left a lot of questions on the table in terms of
20 data. We are really looking for that data to
21 understand how the city is out there. I heard a lot
22 of intention from the city about how they want to do
23 what they want to do and that, we are not negating.
24 That is real. I know that the city is working really
25 hard. The question is, how is that happening? Where
is that happening? Where does it need to happen?

1
2 How does it need to happen? And I just keep hearing
3 over and over again, that cash assistance is going to
4 be key to stabilizing people's housing issues and as
5 immigrants who have a long and very traumatized
6 relationship with government, many times just that
7 information is going to need good information, solid
8 information, protections. Legal protections and I
9 think that the real opportunity here is through this
10 vaccine operation that has really yet to I think
11 saturate into our immigrant communities and that
12 needs to happen for our city to reopen. And if it
13 won't happen, our city will not reopen until we get
14 to that last 20 percent. That last mile of community
15 members and that's not going to happen at a Javits
16 where you have military operations. It is going to
17 happen in a local CBO and that's where a local CBO
18 can really build a suite of interactions that are not
19 just housing. It's health related, it's education
20 related. It's back to the fabric of what the city is
21 doing with good intentions but is not reaching these
22 community members.

23 And so, that's where - I think that's where we
24 are ending. We were going to follow up for more
25 information but I am heartened by the discussion

3 today and thank you advocates for the fight. Thank
4 you to our Sunset Park residents who serve this
5 conversation and thank you Director Bae and our
6 Deputy Commissioners who were here today from HPD.

7 We are going to want to really be creative and we
8 have a budget opportunity right now that we want to
9 impact. And so, that's not going to happen on its
10 own and it is going to require a lot of advocacy on
11 our part.

12 So, [SPEAKING IN SPANISH 2:58:17-2:58:52]. Okay,
13 well this is it. I am going to close this hearing.
14 Thank you to our incredible staff Harbani, Elizabeth
15 Lorena, Caesar, Tony and everybody on the Housing
16 Committee Staff as well. Thank you so much and we
17 are now closed. [GAVEL] Be safe.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date June 6, 2021