



September 24, 2024

Testimony of Kenneth Lo, Senior Advisor on Language Access, Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

Before a hearing of the New York City Council's Committee on Immigration

Oversight Hearing - Assessing the Mayoral Administration's Compliance with Local Law 30 of 2017

I. Introduction

Thank you to Chair Avilés and the other members of the Committee on Immigration for the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Kenneth Lo, and I currently serve as Senior Advisor on Language Access at the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, or MOIA. I am joined here today by my colleagues, Young Kwon, who serves as Senior Manager for Language Access and Lorena Lucero, Chief Policy Advisor at MOIA. I am also grateful to sit alongside Director Daniel Steinberg and Senior Policy Advisor, Francisco Navarro from the Mayor’s Office of Operations, who will be available for questions and answers.

Local Law 30 has been a remarkably valuable tool since it was first enacted over seven years ago.¹ It is of particular importance now, as more than 217,300 immigrants have arrived in New York City since the spring of 2022.² Our office has continued to coordinate the citywide implementation process for Local Law 30, and overall, the agencies in New York City have done excellent work in improving their language access. Our goals in this testimony are threefold. First, we would like to share how MOIA has approached language access since the bill’s enactment and, specifically, how it has guided implementation of Local Law 30 throughout the city. Second, we would like to both highlight our areas of progress and to share what we have learned over the course of implementation, including ongoing challenges and opportunities. Finally, we would like to speak about how MOIA looks to expand and deepen language access, as a tool that can serve all New Yorkers, regardless of where they come from.

In 2017, Council passed our current language access law, which codified the executive order from 2008 into both our City Charter and our Administrative Code and expanded the list of designated citywide languages to ten.³ The last oversight hearing dedicated to Local Law 30 took place not long after the law’s original passage, in 2018. At the time, MOIA had guided a number of public-facing agencies through the development of their first Language Access Implementation Plans. Since then, MOIA has continued to work with agencies across the city in meeting the law’s designated findings and intent of recognizing that “effective language access is a tool to promote equity in economic opportunity, education, health, civic participation, and all other aspects of the life of the city, and that it is a necessary component of city agencies’ ability to accomplish their mandates.”⁴

II. The Language Landscape in New York City and Local Law 30

Earlier this year, the book *Language City* explored and celebrated the linguistic diversity of New York City. According to its author, Ross Perlin, roughly 10% of the world’s 7,000 languages can be found in the five boroughs of the most linguistically diverse city in the United States (and perhaps in the history of the world).⁵ From its early days as New Amsterdam, when

¹ New York City Local Law 30 (2016)

² Carlos Garcia, “Legal Work Authorization Still Eludes Most Migrants to New York” *City and State New York* (Jun. 25, 2024), available at <https://www.cityandstateny.com/policy/2024/06/legal-work-authorization-still-eludes-most-migrants-new-york/397650/>

³ See New York City Admin. Code, Ch. 11 and New York City Charter, Ch. 1, §15(c)

⁴ Local Law 30, *supra* note 1 at §1.

⁵ See Ross Perlin, *LANGUAGE CITY 18* (2024).

there were newspapers in 18 languages other than English, New York has always been synonymous with linguistic diversity.⁶

When the language access team at MOIA speaks with city staff, we always highlight the scale and breadth of that diversity. Currently, 60% of New Yorkers are immigrants or the children of immigrants.⁷ Roughly half of New Yorkers speak a language other than English at home.⁸ And 22% – about one out of every four New Yorkers – are considered to have limited English proficiency, otherwise known as LEP.⁹ In fact, the number of New Yorkers who have LEP is roughly the same size as the entire population of Queens or Brooklyn.¹⁰ In national terms, LEP New York would be the fourth largest city in the entire United States.¹¹

New York City also has the largest city government in the country, with over 300,000 employees.¹² In government, communication is at the core of serving all New Yorkers effectively. But in this linguistically diverse city, language is far more than just a means of communication: it is also an integral part of people’s identity and heritage and an integral part of our city.

This understanding drives the work of the language access team at MOIA. We recognize that significant barriers persist in accessing city services, and language access must be at the forefront of our efforts, not as an afterthought. In fact, the following mantra has guided MOIA in its oversight of Local Law 30 and across all of its efforts on language access: “A multilingual city requires a multilingual government.”

Local Law 30 sets the foundational obligations of New York City agencies to build this multilingual government. First, the law provides a rubric for designating ten citywide languages, based on a combination of data from the Census Bureau and the Department of Education. Those languages have been Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Bangla, Korean, Haitian Creole, Arabic, French, Urdu, and Polish.¹³

Second, each “covered agency” must designate a Language Access Coordinator (LAC): covered agencies include every agency that provides direct services or emergency services to the public.¹⁴

⁶ New York Historical Society, LANGUAGE CITY: LIVE FROM NEW AMSTERDAM, [Language City // Live from New Amsterdam \(youtube.com\)](#) (last viewed Sept. 20, 2024).

⁷ New York City Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, 2021 REPORT 1 (2021)

⁸ The United States Census Bureau, WHY WE ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME: NEW YORK CITY, <https://www.census.gov/acs/www/about/why-we-ask-each-question/language/#:~:text=to%20Topics%20Page-.Why%20We%20Ask%20Questions%20About...the%20ability%20to%20speak%20English>. (last viewed Sept. 20, 2024).

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ See Data Commons, NEW YORK CITY, https://datacommons.org/place/geoId/3651000?utm_medium=explore&mprop=count&popt=Person&hl=en; Data Commons, Queens, <https://datacommons.org/place/geoId/36081>; Data Commons, BROOKLYN, <https://datacommons.org/place/geoId/36047> (last visited Nov. 20, 2024).

¹¹ See The United States Census Bureau; *supra* note 7; World Population Review, LARGEST US CITIES BY POPULATION 2024, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities> (last visited Nov. 20, 2024).

¹² New York City Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, 2021 REPORT 1 (2021)

¹³ NYC Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, LANGUAGE AND DISABILITY ACCESS, <https://home.nyc.gov/site/immigrants/about/language-and-disability-access.page> (last visited Sept. 19, 2024)

¹⁴ Local Law 30, *supra* note 1 at §23-1102(3)(b)(1).

Third, every agency must develop a Language Access Implementation Plan that includes consideration of specified aspects of agency operation, including the particular services that it provides and the documents that it delivers to the public. Each covered agency must then provide written translation of its most commonly distributed documents, including licenses, permits, and registrations into the ten designated citywide languages. Each agency must also provide oral interpretation services. Since the law specifies that interpretation must be available for over 100 languages, this has always meant being able to support interactions through telephonic interpretation. Each agency must then provide notification of its free interpretation services. Finally, every agency must post its implementation plan on its website and update it at least every three years.¹⁵

III. Local Law 30 Monitoring and Oversight

The City Charter identifies an Office of the Language Services Coordinator within the Mayor's Office of Operations that fulfills its duties in consultation with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. Since Local Law 30, MOIA has taken the lead on language access with support from Operations. Local Law 30 provides essential anchors for MOIA's ongoing monitoring and oversight of language access efforts across City agencies. These anchors, primarily the development of Language Access Implementation Plans and annual reporting, serve as crucial touchpoints in what MOIA views as a continuous cycle of improvement rather than a one-time checklist.

MOIA actively engages with covered agencies throughout the year, recognizing that language access is an ongoing process requiring constant attention and refinement. During the first six months of this year, for example, MOIA intensively guided agencies through the process of updating their Language Access Implementation Plans. This comprehensive effort included providing detailed guidance on plan development and incorporating recent expansions to Local Law 30 because of new legislation.¹⁶ MOIA hosted ten convenings focused on developing specific sections of the plan, creating valuable opportunities for agencies to share best practices and learn from one another. As a result of this process, the public can now view these updated plans on each agency's website, as well as on MOIA's website.

The annual reporting cycle, now aligned with the Fiscal Year, provides another key anchor for monitoring progress.¹⁷ Through an annual survey, MOIA collects critical information on agency progress and challenges, which then informs the Annual Report that is submitted to City Council by December 15th. This process helps identify priority areas for targeted support in the coming year, ensuring that language access efforts continually adapt to changing needs and circumstances.

MOIA collaborates closely with the Mayor's Office of Operations to ensure the effectiveness of the reporting process. This partnership focuses on improving measurements of language access and strengthening the overall monitoring system. By working together, MOIA

¹⁵ See generally Local Law 30, *supra* note 1.

¹⁶ New York City Council, Council Votes to Increase Language Access for City Services & Expand Opportunities for New Yorkers with Disabilities (Dec. 21, 2021), available at [Council Votes to Increase Language Access for City Services & Expand Opportunities for New Yorkers with Disabilities - Press \(nyc.gov\)](#).

¹⁷ New York City Local Law 6 (2022).

aims to continue developing more comprehensive metrics and evaluation methods that will provide a clearer picture of language access progress across city agencies and will identify areas for continuous improvement.

MOIA supplements these structured processes with proactive outreach, one-on-one technical assistance, and additional guidance through convenings. This ensures that each agency receives tailored support in enhancing their language access capabilities and reinforces the concept of language access not as a static achievement, but as an ongoing commitment to serving New York City’s culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

IV. An Expansion of Activities: New Laws, New Work, and New Collaborations

In addition to our ongoing monitoring and oversight of the agencies covered under Local Law 30, City Council has passed new laws on language access since its last oversight hearing on this topic in 2017. We would like to highlight MOIA’s recent activities related to Local Law 6 and Local Law 13 of 2023, both of which extend and strengthen the nature of Local Law 30.

First, Local Law 6 presents an opportunity to explore how community-based organizations (CBOs), in particular those that are already focused on serving immigrant communities, could be a part of the solution to language access in New York City. Local Law 6 requires MOIA to conduct a survey of CBOs, to assess their capacity to provide translation, interpretation, and other related language services.¹⁸ During the past year, MOIA consulted with the Department of Small Business Services, the Mayor’s Office of Nonprofit Services, and the Mayor’s Office of Contract Services, and then reached out to over 2,000 contacts of immigrant-serving groups in NYC. We collected responses from 68 CBOs and had informative conversations with 14 of them, using two focus groups to discuss their language service delivery and other vehicles for language access support. Through this survey and the focus groups, we gained valuable insights directly from CBOs about their experiences, challenges, and potential in providing language access services. This feedback has been instrumental in shaping MOIA’s strategy moving forward, particularly in terms of how we can better collaborate with CBOs to enhance language access across the city.

Second, under Local Law 13, whenever a “global event, occurrence, trend or pattern” occurs that causes new populations to arrive in the city and seek services, the Office of the Language Services Coordinator must now designate the “temporary languages” that need to be taken into account.¹⁹ Given the large number of new immigrants from West Africa that have arrived in the city in recent months, the City’s new temporary languages are Wolof and Pular.²⁰ As a result, in addition to the ten languages designated under Local Law 30, relevant agencies must provide both documents and services in these two languages as well.

However, implementing services in Wolof and Pular presents unique challenges that go beyond mere translation, as the written systems of these languages are not as widely used by their speaking populations. As a result, MOIA has taken a proactive and collaborative approach to develop more nuanced guidance. We have engaged in extensive consultations with linguists, front-line staff, and speakers of these languages to better understand the linguistic landscape and the

¹⁸ See generally Local Law 6, *supra*, note 17.

¹⁹ Local Law 13 §23-1105 (2022).

²⁰ Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, GUIDANCE ON TEMPORARY LANGUAGES NEW YORK CITY ADMINISTRATIVE CODE § 23-1105 2 (2024)

most effective ways to provide language access. In doing so, we aim to provide guidance that truly resonate with the communities, affirming their dignity and value to our city’s diverse tapestry.

In addition to the city’s obligations under these two new laws, MOIA also now provides technical assistance and training to agencies throughout the city. Through direct consultation, regular convenings, an intranet portal, and a newsletter, we provide support and guidance for both agency LACs and other colleagues. This guidance includes not just the obligations of covered agencies under Local Law 30, but also on making more effective use of translation and interpretation services, identifying potential partners in their fields, and working more effectively with bilingual staff.

The MOIA Language Access team also pays close attention to federal, state, and city legislation related to language access, as well as developments in the rapidly-changing language service and technology industry (roughly a \$50 billion industry).²¹ We participate in the Municipal Language Access Network, which consists of over 250 individuals working the language access arena, across many cities, counties, and states.²² MOIA collaborates with a range of CBOs who provide immigrant services directly: in doing so, we also learn about ongoing challenges and triumphs in the field.

In addition to this more detailed and expansive work, under the Adams administration, Commissioner Manny Castro has focused additional resources on expanding MOIA’s language access efforts under what we have come to call the “Language Access Hub Initiative.” This initiative involves a significant expansion of our language access team: over the last 18 months, MOIA has gone from one full-time staff member and two colleagues on temporary lines to a team of 18. We now have three full-time staff working on language access and 15 staff members – two project managers and 13 linguists or “language access specialists” – who provide translation and additional support primarily for MOIA, Mayoral Offices, and City Hall.

For example, this summer, the team started supporting certain translations for City Hall press releases alongside the Mayor’s Office of Ethnic and Community Media. Other staff members have participated in the Language Access “Secret Shopper” program overseen by the Mayor’s Office of Operations; others have supported IDNYC registrations; still others have helped conduct site visits of Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Centers (HERCCS), as well as the Arrival Center for asylum seekers. In many ways, we have long considered MOIA to be a “language lab” where we can explore potential resources and practices and assess how they might be shared out with City agencies. Indeed, having in-house linguist capacity has helped us to both identify challenges and to develop solutions.

²¹ Yahoo Finance, “The \$50 Billion Industry That No One Has Ever Heard Of”: Why a Lack of Translation and Localization Services Could Be Costing You Sales Every Day,” *Yahoo* (Jun. 23, 2024), https://finance.yahoo.com/news/50-billion-industry-no-one-173100339.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2x1LmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAADCBYd-hMRG7dmimvaI_5eFXBaaKVhTNPxS4bEVrSZC5xIKAEZzSTgXhRW77Ob8Bjw2SATM9n9I9qaqbAAT-vVF4gYNjckX7msmY9RozBKnhxXswLQdJw7XSDYd5FvNULQTXedywJSR6O9Mrm6HiATUpmJ26g3qLtIClZ49bilO2

²² See MEMBERSHIP FORM: MUNICIPAL LANGUAGE ACCESS NETWORK, <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdnTL9LHfStqHYvDB0WKsxfwJhC6FCQMenMbWcofke9d9epPw/vi ewform> (last visited Sept. 19, 2024).

Many of the elements of this expansion at MOIA align with Councilmember Hanif's current proposal, Intro 215, that would require the creation of an Office of Translation and Interpretation within MOIA. However, because of our practical experience in trying to expand our translation team—as well as past discussions with NYC Public School's Office of Language Access about their Translation and Interpretation unit—we do not support the bill as it is written. However, we do agree that some centralization of resources would benefit City agencies, and we are open to discussing more with Council about options for the City to expand language services.

Finally, in the seven years since Local Law 30 was passed, we have also taken an increasingly collaborative approach to our work to expand strategic capacity building. For example, in 2022, when certain citywide language service contracts available through the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) were expiring, MOIA and the Mayor's Office of Contract Services (MOCS) guided agency procurement teams through the process of understanding and procuring their own services, in conjunction with Language Access Coordinators and internal users. At the same time, MOIA also helped advise DCAS on the procurement of a citywide contract for telephonic interpretation and video remote interpretation. In the coming year, MOIA will also collaborate with MOCS, to expand contracted resources for quality language services that will be available across a range of city agencies. Building on Local Law 6, this will be done with consideration of where CBOs also fit into the range of services to support multilingual government.

MOIA has also worked with Department of City Planning's Population Division to amplify and expand their work in presenting Census data on language, including the interactive visual tools available online with their Population MapViewer. As noted earlier, MOIA is engaging with the Mayor's Office of Operations to consider better metrics for language access across agency operations, including those included the Mayor's Management Report.²³ We are also exploring how to build a better dashboard to document and advance language access. And our teams are building on the Language Access Secret Shopper (LASS) program, which has its roots as an internal Customer Service initiative, to enhance LASS' role in advancing language access maturity. Indeed, MOIA and Operations have consistently worked in tandem. We continue to collaborate closely, tapping into our relative strengths, including the wealth of experience and cross-agency understanding that Operations staff possess.

These cross-agency efforts are central to the approach that MOIA is taking going forward, embedding language access considerations throughout the operations of city government. We are currently seeking to introduce and inculcate language access in existing discussions hosted by other City agencies, such as the Digital Equity Working Group or Outreach Working Group, and through launching new "Community of Practice" groups that include staff from various different agencies to focus on key areas of operations, such as translation leads. Now, these conversations can support systematic attention and improvement.

V. Ongoing Challenges and Future Exploration for Local Law 30

As mentioned, Local Law 30 is seven years old, although its core is essentially the Executive Order from 2008, and the "field" of language access itself is now more than twenty

²³ Local Law 30 states that there shall be an Office of the Language Service Coordinator within The Mayor's Office of Operations. *See* Local Law 30, *supra* note 1, at § 23-1102(3).

years old.²⁴ Despite persistent challenges, New York City has been at the forefront of language access because of City Council, City agencies, and advocates. In recent years, there has also been a groundswell around language access nationwide – from a US Department of Justice memo in 2022 that pushed federal agencies to update their language access plans for the first time in roughly a decade, to the 2022 launch of the New York State Office of Language Access along with an increase in the number of official state languages, to the passage of a New Jersey language access law just earlier this year.²⁵

At MOIA, we want the City to continue to lead the nation in this field. However, old challenges can persist, and new challenges may arise. For example, the breadth and diversity of both New York City’s languages, the traditional reliance on text-heavy communications, and the number of government agencies and systems continues to be a challenge, as does the occasional loss of Language Access Coordinators and their institutional knowledge with them. Even the mounting legislative successes in states and cities pose important challenges for coordination and consistency.

The City can be and has been more deliberate in advancing language access across the range of city operations. For example, by passing Local Law 6, and shifting reporting to the fiscal year, City Council has allowed language access to be recognized as a core operational function of city government. Likewise, in passing Local Law 13, City Council has required the city to recognize the ever-shifting demographics of a place such as New York City, especially during a time in which we are welcoming the greatest number of asylum seekers from new places than in any other time in our history.²⁶

In addition, MOIA is also internally developing and incorporating into our work what we refer to as a “maturity model” for language access. This is both a conceptual and a practical tool for advancing language access across a range of agency operations – moving from *ad hoc* responses to building a level of compliance with a solid, basic infrastructure in place that aligns with LL30 and then towards more systematized management with strong metrics and feedback loops. This model will provide a roadmap for agencies to continually improve their language access services, moving progressively towards a system that fully embraces NYC’s multilingual identity and helps move us towards a more multilingual government.

In the end, language access cannot be an afterthought in the way we think and serve New York City, as is too often the case. This is why MOIA is also expanding collaborations with partners both in and out of City government. For example, we are working to ensure that upcoming changes to the City’s technical digital infrastructure incorporate language technology appropriately to advance multilingual communication. We also plan on working with MOCS, to procure a strong group of professional vendors for a broader array of language services. Finally,

²⁴ See Exec. Order No. 13166 (2000). With this executive order, President Clinton extended civil rights protections against discrimination to individuals who had Limited English Proficiency.

²⁵ See U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, “U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Updates Agency Language Access Plan” (Nov. 15, 2023); New York State, OFFICE OF LANGUAGE ACCESS, <https://ogs.ny.gov/office-language-access> (last visited Sept. 19, 2024); New Jersey Legislature, Bill S2459/A3837 (2024).

²⁶ The City of New York, “As City Anticipates Surpassing Highest Recorded Shelter Census, Mayor Adams Declares Asylum Seeker State of Emergency, Calls for Urgent Aid From Federal, State Governments” (Oct. 7, 2022), available at <https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/728-22/as-city-anticipates-surpassing-highest-recorded-shelter-census-mayor-adams-declares-asylum-seeker#0>

we plan to work with several different agencies to improve our capacity for multilingual rapid response and emergency communications.

Beyond government operations, our strategy also encompasses a holistic approach to language access that leads us towards language justice, a goal which truly engages and empowers culturally and linguistically diverse New Yorkers. We are committed to supporting community-based language efforts and fostering the development of professional pipelines for current and future linguists and language industry specialists. We recognize that effective language access policies and practices across agencies must align with the lived experiences of the New Yorkers they aim to serve. As a result, we are actively developing strategies to collaborate with impacted communities not merely as end-users, but as essential partners throughout the entire process—from initial planning to implementation and evaluation. Just as language access cannot be an afterthought, the communities we serve must be at the forefront of our considerations and decision-making processes. We look forward to forging stronger and more meaningful partnerships with these organizations in the future, leveraging their expertise and community connections to enhance our language access efforts and fill in the gaps when needed.

In conclusion, as we look to the future, MOIA remains committed to advancing the goals of Local Law 30 while also pushing the boundaries of language access even more. Our vision extends beyond compliance to creating a truly multilingual government, that celebrates and harnesses the linguistic diversity of our city. We recognize that that diversity of language is an asset – a vital thread in this rich tapestry of New York City.



Shahana Hanif

CITY COUNCIL MEMBER, DISTRICT 39

Opening Statement of Council Member Shahana Hanif to the Committee on Immigration

Tuesday, September 24, 2024, 1 P.M.

Council Chambers- City Hall

Good afternoon, I'm Council Member Shahana Hanif. I regret that I am dealing with some health issues and unable to join in person today. Thank you to Chair Avilés for holding this important hearing, reading this statement on my behalf, and including Intro. 215 on today's agenda. I'd also like to thank the 18 Council Members who have signed onto this bill, including co-prime sponsors Council Members De La Rosa, Marte, Brannan, Narcisse, Brewer, Ung and Gutiérrez.

As the Committee Report lays out, the City's inefficient language access infrastructure has caused city agencies to fail to meet the requirements for translation and interpretation set out by Local Law 30 of 2017. Due to a lack of sufficient intragovernmental resources, city agencies issue large language service contracts to out-of-state companies who produce subpar work at high costs.

The consequences are serious. During the pandemic, the City was often unable to communicate time-sensitive information to our immigrant communities regarding the vaccine, safety protocols, and changing policies. Additionally, as the number of new arrivals has increased over the past two years, language access has been a consistent barrier to connecting folks to essential services.

Intro. 215 seeks to mitigate this issue by establishing an Office of Translation and Interpretation within the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. This would consolidate the ongoing and often overlapping work of the Language Access Team, Language Service Team, and Office of the Language Services Coordinator into one streamlined and strengthened entity. As this Office scales up, it would directly fulfill more and more agency requests for document translation and live interpretation at events, allowing agencies to wean off of external contracts. This would increase the quality of the work, decrease wasteful spending, and create jobs for New Yorkers with language skills.

The Office would also play a parallel role to the State Office of Language Access, overseeing Local Law 30 implementation and providing guidance and support across city agencies. The Office could additionally serve as the City's main support entity for the Community Interpreter Bank and the three worker-owned language service cooperatives for languages of limited diffusion that this Council has funded and is helping to launch.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to testimony from the Administration and the public.



New York City Council Committees on Immigration & Small Business

Oversight - Assessing the Mayoral Administration's Compliance with Local Law 30 of 2017

Testimony of the New York Immigration Coalition September 24, 2024

Good morning. My name is Taina Wagnac, I am the Senior Manager of State and Local Policy at the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC), an umbrella policy and advocacy organization that works statewide with over 200 immigrant-serving member and partner organizations. Thank you to Chair Avilés, and members of the City Council Immigration Committee for convening this hearing and allowing us the opportunity to testify on the topic of the Administration's compliance with the city's Language Access law. We also submit this testimony in support of Introduction 215, sponsored by Councilmember Hanif which would establish an office of translation and interpretation within the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) for the creation of much needed translated agency documents, and provision of interpretation services.

Today, Council will hear a clear and unequivocal message from those testifying: city agencies (DOE, DSS, H+H) are blatantly violating and failing to follow the requirements under Local Law 30. Seven years later, information factsheets, application forms and emergency information distributed by key city agencies are still only available in English, occasionally in Spanish and Chinese. Few agency offices and service centers have translated documents available onsite, and signs to inform immigrant individuals of the language services provided by the agency. Even worse, agencies like DSS that provide the essential services and benefits that immigrants and asylum seekers seek are the ones repeatedly falling short of offering interpretation and translation services.

Furthermore, agencies also exhibit a pattern of neglect when it comes to immigrants who speak languages other than English or Spanish. Often, immigrants who speak less commonly known languages (LLDs) are told that only Spanish and English speakers could be accommodated at the time, with the staff present making little to no effort in connecting the individual with an interpreter. This is a clear violation of Local Law 30 and an unacceptable practice that creates more barriers for immigrant New Yorkers and puts vulnerable individuals at risk.

This failure has real consequences. They have a ripple effect on immigrant individuals and families alike, adding on to their struggles as they navigate complex systems in a language they do not understand. These failures not only reveal agencies' blatant violations of Local Law 30 but also reflect a broader lack of preparedness on the part of these agencies to meet their obligations and the language needs of communities they serve. When language services



are inadequate, individuals are denied access to crucial services, whether it's applying for emergency shelter, understanding their legal rights, or receiving medical care. When a city known as "the city of immigrants" fails to acknowledge its immigrant residents by providing language access, it erodes trust, jeopardizes their safety, and prevents them from accessing critical resources.

We thank the Council for advancing critical investments for translation and interpretation in public schools, and for restoring funding in FY25 Budget for the development of the NYC Community Interpreter Bank, and Language Services Worker-Owned Cooperatives to increase the availability and supply of trained community interpreters.

We urge the Council to pass **Introduction 215 (Hanif)** to establish a central team of language specialists within the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to ensure consistent, accurate translations across all city agencies and help meet the needs of New Yorkers with limited English proficiency.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Submitted by:
Taina B Wagnac
Senior Manager of State and Local Policy
New York Immigration Coalition



Testimony

**New York City Council
Committee on Immigration**

Hearing on Oversight: Local Law 30 of 2017, requiring city agencies to provide language access to services in designated citywide languages

Tuesday, September 24, 2024

**Submitted by
Susan Marks, Director of Pro Bono & Engagement**

**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services, Archdiocese of New York**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today on behalf of Catholic Charities Community Services, Archdiocese of New York (CCCS) about the impact of language access in New York City. I am Susan Marks, Director of Pro Bono & Engagement for the Immigrant and Refugee Services Division of CCCS. Today's testimony will focus on our agency's experiences with language access serving immigrant New Yorkers.

INTRODUCTION

CCCS is proud of our decades-long tradition of welcoming New York's immigrants and refugees. Our services have tremendous impact on communities across New York City. The scope and diversity of our services is exceptional.

Through CCCS programs, migrants in New York City have access to a variety of legal services, social services, English language classes, workforce development and support, housing assistance, food support, and other services. However, the recent arrival of more than 216,000 asylum seekers to New York City and the changing populations of asylum seekers have had profound impacts across our programming spaces as we seek to meet those populations' needs.

Barriers to language access are at the root of many of the issues that migrants face in accessing legal and other services. CCCS applauds the Committee on Immigration for holding this hearing to explore the efficacy of Local Law 30's implementation and we implore the city to continue to

expand its efforts to ensure that direct public services and emergency services are offered in the designated city languages identified by Local Law 30.

We wish to bring the committee's attention to other aspects of our work and experiences serving migrants and the challenges that human and legal service providers and our clients face when language access is not prioritized.

Demographic Shifts in Client Population Seeking Services

The changing demographics of new arrivals to New York City necessitate the use of interpretation services at an unprecedented level. Recently, CCCS has seen a dramatic increase of new arrivals from African countries. Currently, approximately 30% of the new arrivals we encounter through our legal programs are from these nations, such as Guinea, Senegal, and Mauritania. Often, these migrants speak languages that we rarely have encountered previously, including Fulani, Wolof, and Pular. Most African migrants that we see are adults traveling by themselves, and they overwhelmingly have strong asylum claims.

Interpretation and Translation Services are Unfunded or Underfunded by NYC Contracts

Despite the city's stated commitment to language access, most legal and social services contracts do not include sufficient funding for interpretation services. At CCCS, our costs for interpretation services have dramatically increased in the past fiscal year, far beyond what is funded by the city and state. In a recent seven-month period, the Immigrant and Refugee Services Division of CCCS incurred interpretation and translation expenses of more than \$134,000 to support our legal and hotline services and our refugee resettlement work. Only a fraction of this amount is funded through city and state contracts; as an example, one of our more generous contracts budgets \$18,000 per year for language access needs.

The Immigrant and Refugee Services Division purposely and strategically prioritizes recruitment and retention of a multi-lingual staff to mitigate these costs. At present, staff within our division speak more than thirty-five languages and we are actively seeking private funding to supplement the resources made available through city and state contracts.

Private Sector Pro Bono Partners

CCCS is also proud of our work to leverage the pro bono support of New York attorneys to help close the access to justice gap in our region. Since 2018, we have secured pro bono counsel for hundreds of families. However, pro bono partners must often rely on interpreters to support their representation, and many are unwilling or unable to pay for language access services, placing an undue burden on legal services organizations to cover that underfunded cost. In effect, this lack of financial support from those partners increases the cost to providers to leverage pro bono support.

Similarly, CCCS is standing up a volunteer-driven interpretation program, but there are costs

associated with volunteer-run programs as well which include background checks, administrative costs, volunteer training and volunteer management. More resources and support are needed in this area to meet this critical need.

We urge New York City to:

- Increase funding for interpretation costs, so that newcomers to the city can receive critical services.
- Invest in pathways that will actively recruit and certify qualified interpreters for non-Spanish languages.
- Urge the federal government to ensure adequate interpretation services in immigration courts, Social Security offices, and other federal agencies that serve migrants.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your commitment to addressing unmet language access needs in New York City. If you have any questions about this testimony, please contact susan.marks@catholiccharitiesny.org. We look forward to working with you to advance the needs of New York City's most vulnerable populations.

**The New York City Council
Committee on Immigration**

**Oversight: Assessing the Mayoral Administration's Compliance with
Local Law 30 of 2017
September 24, 2024 Hearing
Submitted Electronically September 27, 2024**

Chairwoman Avilés and esteemed committee members: Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

We write on behalf of the Sikh Coalition, the largest Sikh civil rights organization in the United States, to address the urgent need for improved language access for Punjabi-speaking Sikh New Yorkers. New York City is home to a sizable Sikh community, including 11 gurdwaras (Sikh houses of worship), 9 of which are located in the borough of Queens. In South Richmond Hill, where the bulk of our community resides, Sikh New Yorkers are experiencing an epidemic of discrimination in their neighborhoods and in public institutions.

One key component of our organization's work is the provision of expert, pro bono legal assistance to Sikh community members who suffer violent acts of hate. The need for these services are not anecdotal, but a matter of statistical fact: The FBI's most recent dataset, covering calendar year 2023, confirms that Sikhs remain among the three most commonly targeted faith groups for hate crimes and bias incidents. Unfortunately, New York's Sikhs are not immune to these risks:

- In January of 2022, a 58-year-old Sikh taxi driver was attacked (struck in the head and turban), called "turbaned people," and told to "go back to your country" at JFK airport.
- In April of 2022, Nirmal Singh, a 70-year-old Sikh man, was assaulted while on an early morning walk in the Richmond Hill neighborhood of Queens.
- Less than 10 days later, two additional men—Gulzar Singh, age 45, and Sajan Singh, age 58—were both attacked and robbed in the same neighborhood.
- And in October of 2023, 66-year-old Jasmer Singh succumbed to his injuries after being assaulted following a car accident; during the course of the attack, he was called "turban man" by his assailant.

We can only speculate as to why older Sikh men in particular have been targeted in such assaults. Perhaps it is because of their more visible articles of faith—their turbans and long beards—or other intersectional aspects of their identity, like skin color or accented speech. Perhaps it is because of perceptions their assailants have about them, be it estimations of their physical strength or assumptions about their heritage, country of origin, or immigration status.

Regardless, we know that attempts to seek justice after these crimes occur are often stymied by a lack of Punjabi language access. Too often, details that may shed light on a



perpetrator's motive are literally lost in translation when survivors or eyewitnesses have limited English proficiency. Within the past year, the Sikh Coalition published a guide to investigating and prosecuting hate crimes and bias incidents, which outlines the questions that responding officers should ask to help determine if hate or bias may have been a motive in a given crime; these conversations, however, are only possible with adequate language accessibility. **The Council must work with local law enforcement to ensure that Punjabi-English translation services are available to officers who are investigating crimes that may have a hate or bias component.**

Another area of the Sikh Coalition's organizational focus is the continued fight for inclusive education. The vast majority of Sikh New Yorkers living in Queens are working-class first-generation immigrants with limited English proficiency, and many within the community have young children who attend New York City public schools. Alongside the above mentioned rise of hate crimes against adults and elders in our Queens community in the past two years, we have seen an uptick in school bullying against Sikh children in their schools and classrooms. In fact, our landmark [April 2024 report](#) found that nationwide, nearly eight in ten (78%) Sikh children aged 9-18 have experienced behavior categorized as bullying in school.

When Sikh parents in Queens seek intervention from school administrators when their child experiences bullying, they struggle to engage reporting mechanisms and mediation because these resources are not available in Punjabi. As a result, it may take weeks or months for any substantive intervention to occur, and at times, bullying incidents either pass unaddressed or patterns of bullying behavior persist and escalate. In the Sikh Coalition's active efforts to build relationships with individual school administrators and teachers in Queens public schools on behalf of Sikh parents and students, we have been able to work with staff at PS 161 and MS 137 to translate some parent-facing materials into Punjabi and advocate for Punjabi interpreters to assist parents in communicating with school staff. Most recently, we worked alongside the Department of Education's Office of Language Access to translate the Department's Respect for All resources and Student Complaint Reporting Form into Punjabi.

While we are proud of this work, the burden of creating and circulating these translated resources cannot fall solely on us and other individuals or organizations advocating on behalf of the Sikh community. Without access to the Department of Education's own comprehensive and wide-reaching communications channels, our efforts to raise awareness about these two translated resources unfortunately do not reach every member of the Sikh community in New York City. **It is essential that the Department of Education and the Office of Language Access amend their current regulations regarding translation services and resource dissemination, so that significant ethnic and religious enclaves like the Punjabi-speaking Sikh community in Queens are not disproportionately harmed by the lack of Punjabi language access in public schools with sizable Sikh student populations.**

The Sikh Coalition thanks the Committee on Immigration for taking the issue of language access seriously and look forward to working with you to increase access to Punjabi language resources for Sikh families in Queens and across the five boroughs.



Asian American Federation

Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Immigration

September 24, 2024

Thank you Chair Avilés and the Committee on Immigration for inviting us to testify. My name is Riva Shang and I coordinate small business support programs at the Asian American Federation. AAF works to raise the influence and well-being of New York's pan-Asian American community through research, policy advocacy, public awareness, and organizational development. We represent a network of over 70 community organizations in the Northeast who represent many diverse communities of Asian immigrants.

Today's much needed hearing underscores the significance of language access in our communities. AAF, alongside the [Language Justice Collaborative](#), advocated and fought for the passage and implementation of Local Law 30. Since its passage in 2017 however, its implementation has not appropriately reflected in addressing the language access needs in improving access to City services for our community.

To put this into perspective - the Asian population continues to be the fastest-growing group in New York City. Asians now represent 10 percent or more of residents in 26 out of 51 Council Districts. 65% of Asian New Yorkers are foreign-born, and over 40% have limited English proficiency. From a small business perspective, Asian New Yorkers own 18% of employer firms in the city, employing 55,000 people and generating over \$120 billion in economic activity. These businesses are not only economic engines, they are the lifeblood of our communities, serving immigrant needs and anchoring our communities.

These businesses are also at the frontlines of interacting with public-facing city agencies, all of whom are covered under 2017's Local Law 30. As many Asian small businesses are owned and operated by first-generation immigrants with limited English skills, language access is crucial for them to communicate with city agencies and receive equitable service.

Yet, in sample interviews with clients, including 3 restaurants and 2 dry cleaners, 4 out of 5 business owners said they did not know they were entitled to language access when working with city agencies. Only 2 had ever used telephonic interpretation services during inspections. The one restaurant, located in Murray Hill, Queens, that heard about Language Line access from friends and used it regularly, told us that through their 5 years of using the service, it was spotty at best. Sometimes it was helpful, but other times they needed to wait 2 hours for an available interpreter, rendering the service null. In the other and only case, the inspector himself called Language Line when they realized that the owner's English proficiency was limited.

Sometimes but rarely, agencies send inspectors who speak the same language as a business. Most often, English-speaking inspectors do not proactively use interpretation or alert the owner that this is an option. Many of these business owners may speak barely enough English to get through the interaction, but not enough to understand the details or import of what is happening and how to follow up on the inspection. For both dry cleaners, they did not understand that a violation was being issued; inspectors would also write the violations under sections labeled “recommendations,” leading them to believe these were merely suggestions. For anyone who has been ticketed by the city, we know that this will lead to a large accrual of fines and bars on new permits that owners sometimes only discover years down the road; one of the dry cleaners did not discover these violations until three years later, at which point they owned over \$6,000. In another example, a bakery operating in Southern Brooklyn owned by AAF’s very own Lisha’s parents recently experienced a similar issue, where the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection’s inspector failed to provide or offer interpretation at the time of the inspection, leaving them with fines for violations they did not know how to amend. After countless unanswered calls to the DCWP, this issue was only resolved when Lisha reached out to her councilmember, Chair Avilés, to get in contact with DCWP. DCWP’s violation of Local Law 30 underscores the lack of accountability and training of its inspectors. It should not take countless unanswered calls and reaching out to local council members to remind and hold city agencies culpable to city laws, at the expense of the immigrant community’s livelihoods.

In the most egregious cases, the inspector is often a third party contracted by a city agency - usually the Department of Buildings - to do inspections, which they send to the agency who then issues violations based on their reports. We therefore ask the Committee to ensure that third-party inspectors are liable under Local Law 30, as contracted extensions of the city agencies covered by the law.

To this end, we:

- 1.) Support Councilmember Hanif’s move to establish an Office of Translation and Interpretation. We have learned time and time again that human translation and interpretation, as opposed to machine translations, are most accurate in conveying technical information. Poorly translated materials, and unreliable Language Line access create large blind spots where immigrant populations are being left out of access to city services.
- 2.) Recommend that all inspectors, whether city employees or contracted inspectors, be required to relay to inspectees of their right to language access. Given that publicity about Local Law 30 has clearly been minimal, immigrants are mostly unaware that they have the right to access services in non-English languages. Instead of relying on individual immigrants to ask proactively for these rights, we urge the council to require inspectors to ask whether these services are required, even in cases where it may seem that the inspectee has some basic English, so that these residents are aware of the interpretation services available.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify, we look forward to working with you to ensure Local Law 30 is followed and that city agencies are held accountable.

Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc.
Testimony Before the New York City Council Committee On Immigration
Council Member Alexa Avilés, Chair
September 24th, 2024

Thank you Chair Avilés and members of the City Council for the opportunity to testify today. The mission of the Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc. (CPC) is to promote social and economic empowerment of Chinese American, immigrant, and low-income communities. CPC was founded in 1965 as a grassroots, community-based organization in response to the end of the Chinese Exclusion years and the passing of the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. Our services have expanded since our founding to include five key program areas: Early Childhood Education, School-Age Child Care, Education & Career Services, Senior Services, and Community Services.

CPC is the largest Asian American social service organization in the U.S., providing vital resources to more than 80,000 people per year through more than 50 programs at over 30 sites across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. CPC employs over 700 staff whose comprehensive services are linguistically accessible, culturally sensitive, and highly effective in reaching low-income and immigrant individuals and families. To that end, we are grateful to testify about issues that impact the individuals and families we serve, and we are grateful to the Council for their leadership on these issues.

There are persistent barriers that immigrant New Yorkers face in accessing essential services caused primarily by a failure to meet basic language access requirements. We strongly urge the City Council to prioritize linguistically and culturally appropriate language services for immigrant populations and to hold city agencies accountable for providing these services, as they are vital for uplifting our communities.

Language access is a lifeline for our communities, enabling them to more fully utilize critical resources and networks. When agencies lack the necessary linguistic capabilities, marginalized individuals often fall through the cracks. We frequently receive requests from community members seeking assistance in deciphering information related to governmental benefits, programs, or services.

Recent data published by the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) from the Language Access Secret Shopper (LASS) program reveal a troubling reality: the City is falling short of its language access obligations. Despite the implementation of Local Law 30, significant barriers persist for immigrant communities, especially those who speak languages of limited diffusion (LLDs). These speakers remain among the most isolated populations when it comes to accessing essential immigration services, making outreach efforts particularly challenging.

Moreover, the inconsistency in interpretation and translation services across city agencies exacerbates the situation. Different agencies and service providers offer varying levels of language assistance, resulting in a fragmented and unreliable experience for those in need. This lack of uniformity not only undermines trust but also complicates the navigation of crucial services for non-English speakers.

Additionally, a glaring issue is the inadequate culturally competent training for agency staff on utilizing language lines, telephonic services, and navigating the complexities of the conversation with service recipients. Without proper training or resources, staff are ill-equipped

to assist individuals who require language support. Compounding these challenges, many city agencies and providers do not fully comply with Local Law 30 or adhere to their own language access plans. The absence of clear accountability mechanisms or enforcement tools leaves agencies unmonitored, allowing them to neglect their responsibilities to the communities they serve. As a result, the promise of equitable access to services remains unfulfilled for many immigrants in the city.

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

If you have any questions, please contact Ashley Chen, Policy Analyst at achen9@cpc-nyc.org.



NYC Council Immigration Committee Hearing: Language Access within City Agencies and Services

Testimony by the Korean American Family Service Center and the Collective.

Good afternoon, my name is Kelly Cho, Community Outreach Associate at the Korean American Family Service Center (KAFSC) and I will be testifying today on behalf of KAFSC and The Collective, a coalition of gender based violence organizations serving immigrant communities throughout the five boroughs that also includes Sakhi for South Asian Survivors, Sauti Yetu Center for African Women and Families, Violence Intervention Program (VIP), and Womankind. KAFSC is an organization dedicated to empowering immigrant survivors of gender-based violence through comprehensive services. Our clients, many of whom are Korean-speaking immigrants with limited English proficiency, often face barriers in accessing vital city services due to language limitations.

KAFSC and the members of The Collective work directly with survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking—many of whom face significant language barriers when accessing services. In addition to engaging with the city to access services through 311, 1-800-621-HOPE, and Family Justice Centers, individuals impacted by gender based violence are often referred to and receive services from organizations like KAFSC and the members of the Collective, as we have dedicated multilingual staff. The individuals our organizations serve often speak little or no English and rely on us to navigate complex systems, from law enforcement, to housing, healthcare, and the courts.

We fully support Introduction 215 which would establish an Office of Translation and Interpretation within the Office of Immigrant Affairs. This would be a vital step towards ensuring language access for all immigrant communities, including those we serve. This would be a vital step toward ensuring language access for all immigrant communities, including those we serve. Along with this bill, we recommend the Mayor's Office's Language Services Team to create consistency among translation contractors, and expand the languages that translation and interpretation services are offered in. We also recommend providing funding for nonprofits to also ensure they are able to translate documents and communicate with constituents themselves.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Coalition For Asian American
Children+Families

New York City Council
Committee on Immigration
September 24, 2024

Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF)

Good afternoon, my name is Lloyd Feng from CACF, the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families, where I serve as Data Policy Coordinator for our Invisible No More Campaign. Thank you very much to Chair Avilés for holding this hearing and providing this opportunity to testify.

Founded in 1986, CACF is the nation's only pan-Asian children and families' advocacy organization that leads the fight for improved policies, systems, funding, and services for our communities. NYC's Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) populations comprise nearly 18% of the city's overall population. Many in our communities experience high levels of poverty, overcrowding, uninsurance, and linguistic isolation. Yet, the needs of the AAPI community are consistently misunderstood, overlooked, and even erased.

CACF appreciates the stated aims of Local Law 30 to ensure that all New Yorkers have access to language services (interpretation, translation, etc.) in order for them to fully communicate with and receive services from NYC agencies. We share Chair Aviles and the Committee on Immigration's interest in understanding the quality of implementation of Local Law 30 across all agencies, esp. with regard to language access trainings to agency staff, lessons learned between agencies, and how agencies intend to address challenges that persist.

In addition, CACF is particularly concerned about how agency implementation of Local Law 30 is considering the reach of existing agency language access policies, service delivery, and staff in relation to the needs of Asian asylum seekers in NYC, esp. individuals and families who are not part of the DHS/DSS shelter system.

CACF's larger concern about the existing implementation of Local Law 30 is the lack of contextualization of language data collected by agencies. For almost fifteen years, CACF's Invisible No More Campaign has advocated for Asian New Yorkers' needs to be better understood by pushing government agencies to collect and report disaggregated ethnicity data on our communities. In this time, agency officials often shared that ethnicity data was redundant since agencies could rely on language data as a proxy for ethnicity. But we know that language data alone cannot tell the full story of who our communities are and what their needs are, esp. as, over time, future generations increase utilization of English as their primary language, thereby rendering language data increasingly misleading and inaccurate.

As such, CACF calls on NYC Council and NYC agencies to update agency guidance on language data collection, reporting, and use so that agencies incorporate race and ethnicity data collection and reporting when agencies are determining where a community is, who makes up the community, what the community's needs are, and how best to serve them.



Coalition For Asian American Children+Families

**New York City Council
Committee on Immigration
September 24, 2024**

Coalition for Asian American Children and Families (CACF)

Good afternoon, my name is Miral Abbas, and I am the Health Partnerships Coordinator at CACF, the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families. Thank you very much to Chair Avilés for holding this hearing and providing this opportunity to testify.

Founded in 1986, CACF is the nation's only pan-Asian children and families' advocacy organization and leads the fight for improved and equitable policies, systems, funding, and services to support those in need. The Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) population comprises nearly 18% of New York City. Many in our diverse communities face high levels of poverty, overcrowding, uninsurance, and linguistic isolation. Yet, the needs of the AAPI community are consistently overlooked, misunderstood, and uncounted. We are constantly fighting the harmful impacts of the model minority myth, which prevents our needs from being recognized and understood. Our communities, as well as the organizations that serve the community, too often lack the resources to provide critical services to the most marginalized AAPI New Yorkers. Working with over 70 member and partner organizations across the City to identify and speak out on the many common challenges our community faces, CACF is building a community too powerful to ignore.

While Local Law 30 has sought to provide additional support for our LEP community, language barriers are still a huge obstacle faced by many folks in immigrant communities, and especially in our AAPI community. In New York City, the AAPI community has the highest rate of linguistic isolation of any group, as 46% have limited English proficiency (LEP), according to a recent report from the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. Moreover, more than 2 in 3 Asian seniors in NYC are LEP, and approximately 49% of all immigrants in NYC are LEP.

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, we conducted a rapid needs assessment in collaboration with the NYU Center for the Study of Asian American Health and the Chinese-American Planning Council. We surveyed over 1000 adults of Asian, Hispanic/Latinx, or Arab descent living in the metropolitan New York area to assess the current and ongoing needs of the community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study highlights the disproportionate impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the New York Asian American community and demonstrates the importance of language access. Specifically, the study found 1 in 3 (34%) Asian American adults reported language barriers being a challenge during the pandemic. Furthermore, 27% of Asian American respondents

CACF

Coalition For Asian American Children+Families

indicated that they felt like they did not have regular access to timely, accurate information during the COVID-19 pandemic in their language. The study also shed light on the specific language barriers that Asian American folks were facing: Chinese, Korean, and Bangladeshi adults reported high rates of difficulty waiting for an interpreter, while Korean, Japanese and other Asian adults reported high rates of difficulty getting written materials in their preferred languages. Being unable to access vital COVID-19 information or health services can be a threat to one's livelihood.

A recent report from the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs' Language Access "Secret Shoppers" program found that over half of service centers were in some violation of New York City's Local Law 30. Nearly 40% of the centers did not have translated materials at all in 2023 and a quarter of the centers did not provide oral translation services at all. Moreover, the report found that two thirds of the city's Department of Health and Mental Hygiene sites visited by secret shoppers in 2023 did not comply with a language access law. A lack of linguistically accessible services in healthcare settings can have grave consequences: 52% of adverse events that occurred to LEP patients in US hospitals were likely the result of communication errors, and nearly half of these events involved some form of physical harm.

CACF's campaign, "Found in Language Access" aims to ensure that New Yorkers have equitable access to linguistically and culturally responsive services, particularly in healthcare. Our major recommendations to support the LEP New Yorker community, which includes many members of the AAPI community, are as follows:

- Ensure Local Law 30 is properly implemented and improved upon by intentionally partnering with community-based organizations that work directly with New York City's LEP community to provide oversight
- Demand city agencies collect more data on translation and interpretation services and service utilization and ensure this data is regularly made available to the public
- Increase the number of languages for translated signage and forms, and ensure accuracy of translations by engaging community partners in a language review
- Improve the mechanisms in which community members can provide language access complaints and recommendations to ensure it is both linguistically and technologically accessible

We would also like to uplift the need for more language service support across our city agencies for our asylum seeker community. We have heard many AAPI communities are crossing the Southern border and then arriving in NYC and facing huge language barriers. For instance, we have spoken with groups working with families coming from Afghanistan requiring language support in Farsi and Pashto. It is critical that our agencies support the additional language needs of asylum seekers.



**Committee on Immigration
Oversight Hearing
Assessing the Mayoral Administration's Compliance with Local Law 30 of 2017**

TO: The Immigration Committee
FROM: Kathleen DiPerna, Hot Bread Kitchen
DATE: September 27th, 2024

Dear Chair Avilés, Immigration Committee, and Council Staff,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for the oversight hearing about assessing the current administration's compliance with Local Law 30 of 2017. My name is Kathleen DiPerna; I am the Director of Strategy at Hot Bread Kitchen, an organization that promotes economic mobility for women and gender-expansive people, immigrants, and people of color through job training and placement, food entrepreneurship programs, and an ecosystem of support in New York City, using our city's vibrant food industry as a catalyst for career growth.

Over the past 16 years, Hot Bread Kitchen has supported a community of over 1,500 program participants, who we call members, in launching careers in the food industry, starting and growing their small businesses, and accessing the resources they need to succeed at work and in the world. Our community, which includes residents of 50 City Council districts, consists primarily of women of color (93%); most are immigrants (51%). Roughly one-third of our members this year are non-native English speakers, and 70% of our program participants this year were unemployed and below the poverty threshold before enrolling in our program. Our members are dedicated, hard-working New Yorkers seeking opportunities for meaningful careers, sustainable income, and long-term wealth generation for their families.

Since many of our members are immigrants to the United States and most do not speak English as their primary language or are not fluent, we have a firsthand understanding of the importance and need for translation services for immigrants to prosper in a predominantly English-speaking country. This year, adapted our signature culinary workforce development program to meet the unique needs of New York City's Spanish-speaking migrant population by launching our *Culinary Career Pathways for New New Yorkers*.

Our goal for our members is to place them in jobs, and our north star is to put them on a path to economic mobility. Hot Bread Kitchen's workforce program is a five-week, 100-hour, technique-driven training that covers knife, cooking, and baking skills; daily professional readiness lessons; a Food Handlers' certification examination; and a food service simulation. The training is



led by experienced bilingual Chef Instructors who understand the lived experience of immigration, ensuring the linguistic and cultural competency of the staff working most closely with members. Additionally, members of *Culinary Career Pathways for New New Yorkers* focused on migrants and asylum seekers, receive English language classes contextualized for the food industry to support their personal and professional growth and supportive services for both members and employer partners, including (1) ongoing case management with bilingual case managers and referrals to wraparound services and government agency programs in Spanish; (2) job placement support services like resume drafting, interview preparation, and job connections; and (3) employer partner engagement, like systems for regular job feedback shared with the members and Hot Bread Kitchen to support performance improvements.

Having access to education and resources in a native language is imperative for our members, Spanish or otherwise, to navigate and access government resources to build agency and freedom that they can provide. Ofelia, a previous member of Hot Bread Kitchen shared her experience about why this issues matters: "Hot Bread Kitchen offered me a lot of support. If I ever had a financial issue of family needs - they offered me a sitter, a stipend, and metro cards, English classes and SNAP - where were a really helpful". Therefore, Hot Bread Kitchen testifies in support of Intro. 125. requiring the creation of an Office of Translation and Interpretation within the Office of Immigrant Affairs to employ individuals proficient in the designated citywide languages to provide translation and interpretation services to city agencies and city agencies with identifying translation and interpretation services for languages other than the designated citywide languages.

Hot Bread Kitchen members are diverse, just like the vibrant cultural makeup of New York City. Our city agencies, and their programs and staff must reflect this and provide linguistically competent services so our newest neighbors can thrive. Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen DiPerna
Director of Strategy

Testimony

Dear Members of the City Council Committee on Immigration,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today regarding the crucial issue of language access for our community members. My name is Jorge Paz Reyes and I'm the Community Organizer at Mixteca Organization, a community-based organization dedicated to serving the Spanish-speaking population of Sunset Park, as well as individuals from indigenous backgrounds who speak languages such as Taplaneco, Mixteco, Nahuatl, K'iche', Mam, among others.

I recognize that Local Law 30 has played a crucial role in ensuring that all New Yorkers, regardless of their language proficiency, can access vital public services. However, we must acknowledge that significant gaps remain in the enforcement and implementation of this law. Our community members often face language barriers that hinder their ability to access essential services, including health care, education, and social benefits.

Challenges:

1. **Limited Interpretation Services:** While many agencies have Spanish interpreters, the needs of indigenous language speakers are often overlooked. Individuals speaking languages like Nahuatl or Mixteco struggle to find appropriate language assistance, leading to missed opportunities for critical services.
2. **Cultural Competency:** Many service providers lack an understanding of the unique cultural backgrounds of our community members. This not only affects communication but also impacts the overall quality of service they receive.
3. **Awareness of Available Services:** Many Limited English Proficient individuals, especially those from indigenous backgrounds, are unaware of their rights and the services available to them. This lack of awareness is compounded by insufficient outreach efforts in multiple languages.

Recommendations:

1. **Increased Funding for Language Access Programs:** We urge the City Council to allocate additional resources for training interpreters and providing multilingual materials, specifically for indigenous languages.
2. **Expanded Language Services:** We recommend that the city expands the languages that Local Law 30 currently covers, in order to provide community members from indigenous backgrounds to access the resources that they deserve.
3. **Community Engagement Initiatives and Collaboration with CBOs:** Promote outreach programs to educate LEP individuals about their rights and available services, ensuring information is disseminated in all relevant languages. As well continuing the collaboration with Community Based Organizations, such as Mixteca, to ensure that the community is properly given the resources that they need.

Finally, At Mixteca, we believe that our community deserves to be heard, understood, and supported in their native languages. We believe that with stronger enforcement of Local Law 30, increased funding, and improved outreach efforts, we can create a more inclusive city where every resident has equitable access to public services.

Thank you for your attention to this vital matter. We look forward to working together to ensure that all New Yorkers can thrive in our great city.

My name is Mariel Acosta, PhD student in Hispanic sociolinguistics at the CUNY Graduate Center and a mutual aid volunteer and organizer who has been supporting newly arrived migrants for the last year and a half. I've supported asylum seekers from the now closed Stockton respite center and also asylum seeking families from shelters around the city through Monthly Birthing Circle events.

From a critical lens, I would like to raise four language access-related points of concern that I have noticed in institutional texts or that I have come across during my mutual aid work, in order to highlight their relevance to Local Law 30 (LL30) and importance in this context: The need for a nuanced understanding of the varieties within named languages; issues with deficit narratives and approaches to language speaking; variety of literacy levels among the asylum seeking population, and the absence of sign language(s) from discourses of services needed.

1-When referring to named languages, in this context the 10 designated citywide ones under LL30 (Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Bengali, Haitian-Creole, Korean, Arabic, Urdu, French, and Polish) we must understand that **there can be enormous variation within each named language, determined by social, historic, political, geographic and other factors**. A given named language, [say Arabic](#), is not a homogeneous entity and sometimes under the umbrella of its name there are [several distinct languages](#). As LL30 itself acknowledges, under "Chinese language": Mandarin, Cantonese, Taiwanese and a number of others are recognized as distinct languages. The same nuanced understanding of language/dialect/variety should be applied to others such as French and Arabic. For instance, in working directly with men at the Stockton respite and sourcing translators and interpreters from the community, we realized early that some varieties of Arabic were almost mutually unintelligible, that Mauritanian Arabic was very different from the Egyptian, Iranian and Moroccan Arabic varieties spoken by some of our community volunteers. This is important to note when appointing and training staff to provide language services as LL30 determines. Staff that provide language services should come from the communities being served or should be trained in culturally competent and trauma-informed practices that would enrich their understanding of asylum seeker's context.

2- [Deficit approaches](#) are often applied in teaching/learning settings with children considered to have a "word gap" or those who are identified as having "Limited English Proficiency" (LEP), for example, therefore "needing" specialized services. These approaches focus on what students/speakers "lack" (deficit), in this case the English language, and not on the wealth of cultural knowledge and linguistic/languageing abilities they bring, as asset-based approaches suggest. **Deficit narratives are also used in other institutional settings and texts including LL30 itself**, which employs terms like LEP focusing on what speakers "lack" as English learners and assumes it's something that needs to be remedied when in fact, many asylum seekers are multilingual. Likewise, the puzzling phrase "limited English proficiency languages" and the brow-raising "foreign language" and "esoteric languages" appear on LL30. Deficit approaches

and narratives carry a variety of harmful linguistic- and racial ideologies and have been questioned in [critical applied linguistics](#) and [in other fields](#). In order to positively support asylum seekers and their integration, we must shift these deficit narratives and question the uncritical use of these problematic terminologies.

3-Literacy levels have been very little, if at all mentioned at council hearings and meetings between city officials regarding the management of newly arrived immigrant issues. Just as there is variation within languages spoken among asylum seekers, there is **variation in their literacy levels as many did not attend traditional forms of schooling or may come from more oral-tradition centered communities**. This needs to be taken into account in ESOL language initiatives and in the dissemination of translated texts that pertain to shelter eviction, placement and other important directions and instructions. Furthermore, there is a wide spectrum of tech literacy variation among asylum seekers as well, posing a challenge when receiving information through electronics, accessing information in websites, through QR codes, etc. Again, literacy should be approached with the same care and lens critical to our own assumptions and Western-centric prejudices towards speakers' linguistic abilities.

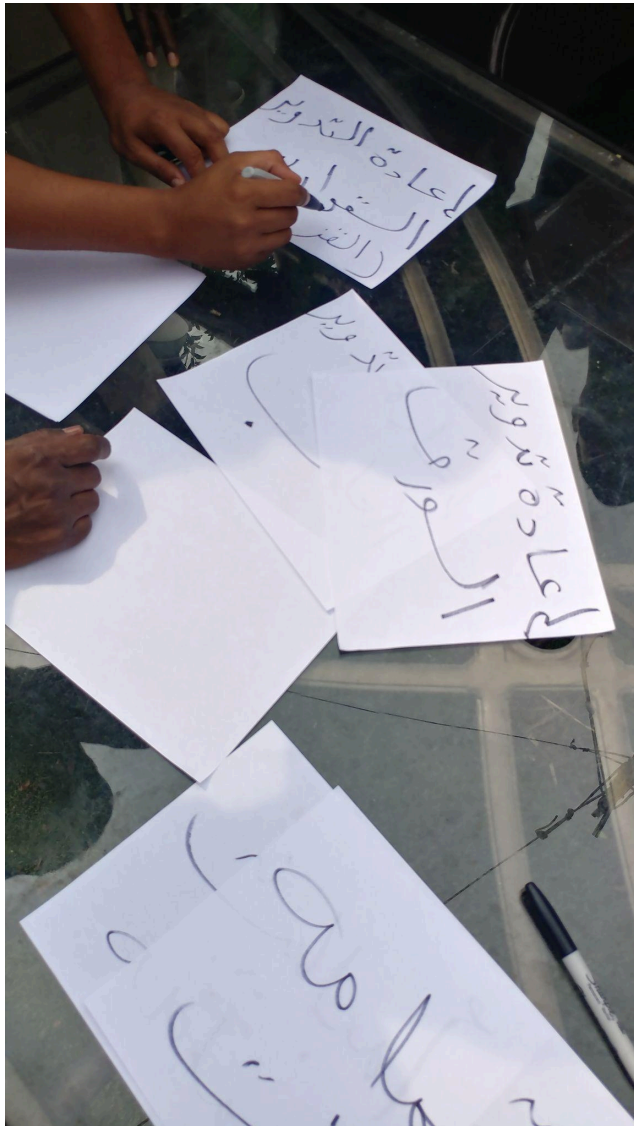
4 And finally, another important and unreported and barely mentioned aspect of **language access issues among asylum seekers is sign language interpretation**. During my work with asylum seeking families, I've come across families with deaf parents, speakers of Venezuelan Sign Language, whose three children had to serve as interpreters from VSL to Spanish in order to communicate with shelter staff. [These have not been the only cases](#). How are speakers of various sign languages supported?

It is a shame that three years into the so-called “migrant crisis,” the City is still scrambling to provide adequate language support to speakers of those designated 10 languages, most of which are already commonly spoken, with hundreds of thousands and in some cases millions of speakers in NYC alone. As the Endangered Languages Alliance documents, in NYC there are speakers of over [700 world languages](#). Language (in)access issues speak to the City's institutions being ill equipped to offer these basic services that should have already been in place and functioning and now during conjuncture.

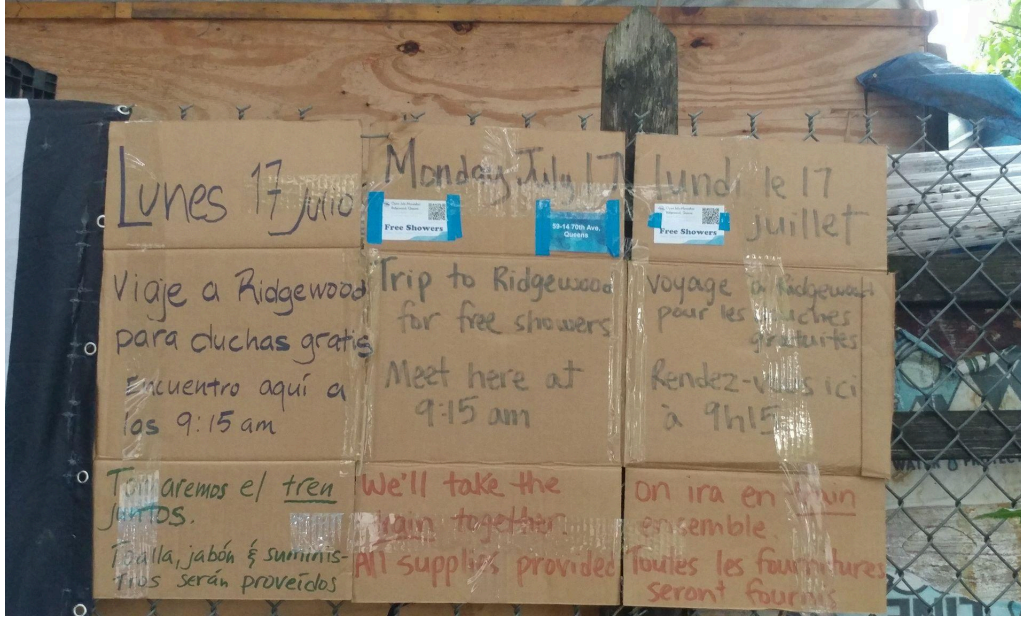
This deliberate lack of implementation of adequate language access measures leaves under-resourced mutual aid groups scrambling to pick up the slack of the companies that get paid millions of dollars to provide these services and for City institutions that contract them to hold them accountable. How can the City of New York, and private contractors paid to source interpreters and translators do a worse job than community volunteer translators and interpreters sourced by mutual aid organizers and just regular people?

The clear violations of Local Law 30 (and its related Executive order 120 of 2008 and the more recently passed LL6 and LL13) in the last two and a half years speak to this administration's **weaponized incompetence**, the deliberate making believe there are no material and human resources available to better support migrants, incompetence they also use to pretend the system doesn't have the capacity to function.

Addendum I - Mutual aid groups' linguistic interventions. Working with asylum seekers on translating signs in various languages to be employed in a communal spaces at Bushwick City Farms



Making signs with Mauritanian and Senegalese migrants in different varieties of Arabic to label trash cans with: “trash,” and “recycling.” Summer 2023

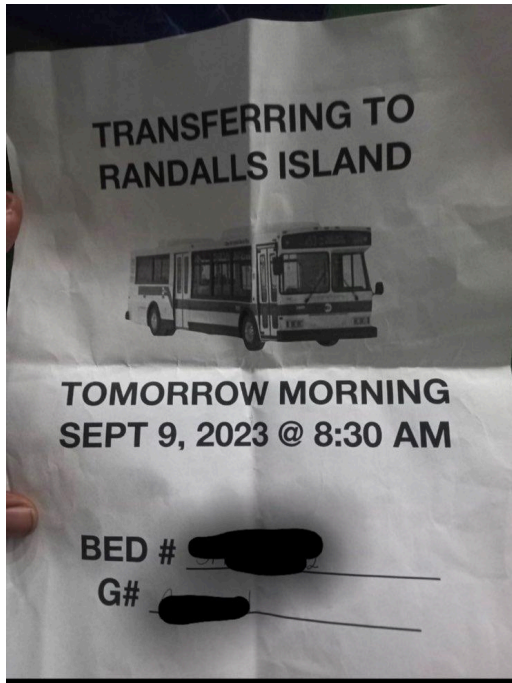


Volunteer-made signs in Spanish, English and French to organize shower trips from migrants at Stockton respite center, where there was no shower access for 4 weeks after the respite opened. Summer 2023.

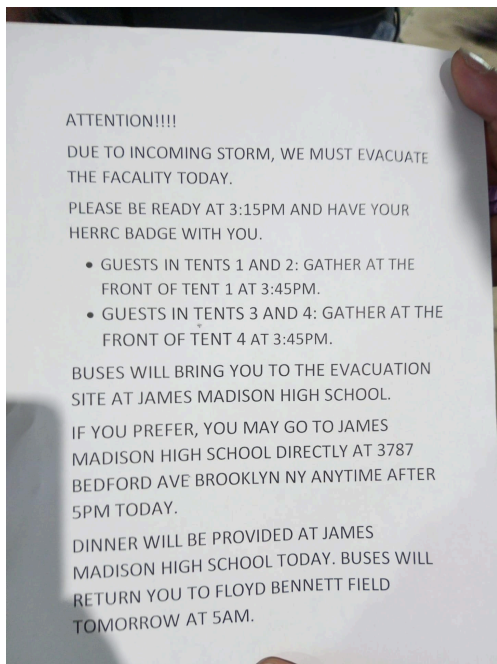


Sign in English, Arabic, French and Spanish on port-a-potty door, outside of Bushwick City Farm, Spring 2024.

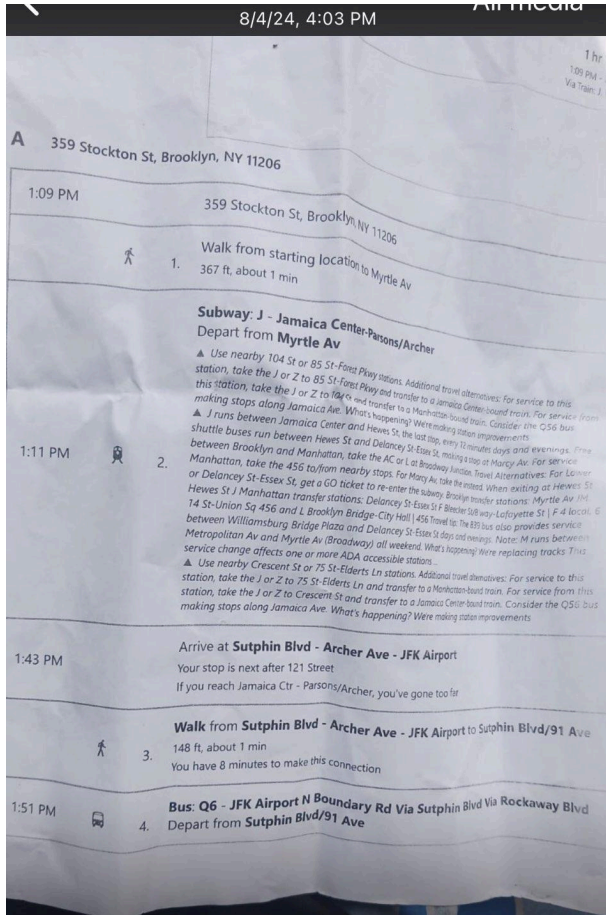
Addendum II - Sample of mistranslated documents (or not translated-English only) given by shelters and respites to asylum seekers.



Flyers given to asylum seekers at the Stockton respite in English on Sept. 2023 on the arbitrary and sudden transfer to Randalls of ~100 men.



Information given to Floy Bennett Field tent shelter families in English on their relocation to a Marine Park school in the middle of the night because of an incoming storm, January 2024. The often inaccurate GoogleLens tool was used by some families to translate the text or they asked us volunteers via chats to translate.



Stockton men given printed Google map directions in their new shelter placement after the respite abruptly closing on August 4 2024

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lorena Lucero, chief policy

Address: adviser

I represent: Mayor's office of Immigrant

Address: Affairs

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: _____

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: KENNETH LO

Address: MOIA SENIOR ADVISOR FOR

I represent: LATVIAN PROCESS

Address: _____

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ADRIANA ISA +

Address: [REDACTED] Belmont

I represent: AR. Ken

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jorge Paz Reyes

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: Mixteca Org

Address: 245 23rd St

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/24/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: LLOYD FENB

Address: _____

I represent: COALITION FOR ASIAN AMERICAN CHILDREN + FAMILIES

Address: 50 BROAD STREET, New York NY 10004

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ann [redacted]

Address: [redacted]

I represent: Mixte Co

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Emery Valbrun

Address: [redacted] 1236

I represent: Mixte Co

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 9/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Riva Shang

Address: _____

I represent: Asian American Federation

Address: _____

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 215 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 9/24/24

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kelly Cho

Address: _____

I represent: KAFC

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Daniel Steinhilber, Director

Address: _____

I represent: Mayor's Office of Operations

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Young Kwon, Director

Address: Language Access Senior Manager

I represent: MOIA

Address: _____