

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

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September 17, 2020

Start: 12:11 p.m.

Recess: 1:53 p.m.

HELD AT: Remote Hearing

B E F O R E: Carlos Menchaca  
CHAIRPERSON

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Margaret S. Chin  
Francisco Moya  
Daniel Dromm  
Mathieu Eugene

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

Bitta Mostofi, Commissioner  
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

William Asian, New York City Resident

Jorge Jauregui, Spanish Translator

Maribel Torres, New York City Resident

Yesenia Mata  
La Colmena

Jesus Benavidez, New York City Resident

Enoc Evangelista, New York City Resident

Jean Bae  
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

Maryanne Tharappel, Director of Special  
Projects for Immigrant and Refugee  
Services  
Catholic Charities of New York

Susanna Saul, Director of Immigration  
Practice  
Her Justice

Manuel Castro, Executive Director  
New Immigrant Community Empowerment

Alba Lucero Villa, Executive Director  
Northern Manhattan Coalition for  
Immigrant Rights

Nadia Marin  
National Day Labor Organizing Network

Ligia Gualpa, Executive Director  
Worker Justice Project

Sophia Gurule, Policy Counselor to  
Immigration Practice  
Bronx Defenders

Rebekah Espinoza, Social worker  
Bronx Defenders

Nyasa Hickey, Director of Immigration  
Initiative  
Brooklyn Defender Services

Michael J. Eatroff, Attorney  
New York Legal Assistance Group

Rex Chen, Immigration Director  
Legal Services of New York City

Hasan Shafiquillah, Attorney  
Legal Aid Society

Ravi Reddi, Associate Director for  
Advocacy and Policy  
Asian-American Federation

Hallie Yee, Policy Coordinator  
Coalition for Asian-American Children and  
Families

Shaaryana Pilai, Deputy Director  
India Home

Jeehae Fischer, Executive Director  
Korean-American Family Service Center

Frances Huang, Policy Associate  
Chinese-American Planning Council

Andrew Ochoa, Program Coordinator  
Hispanic Federation

Zachary Ahmed, Policy Counsel  
New York Civil Liberties Union

Whitney Hu, Founder and Organizer  
South Brooklyn Mutual Aid

Jose Chapa, Senior Policy Associate  
Immigrant Defense Project

Carina Kaufman Gutierrez, Deputy Director  
Street Vendor Project  
Urban Justice Center

Sara Elsebai, Immigration Navigator  
Arab-American Association

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Sergeants, you can begin  
3 your recording. And, Mr. Bradley, I will leave it to  
4 you.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Okay. Hello? You hear  
6 me? Okay. Good afternoon and welcome to today's New  
7 York City Council hearing of the Committee on  
8 Immigration. At this time, would all panelists  
9 please turn on your videos? To minimize disruption,  
10 please place electronic devices on vibrate or silent  
11 mode. If you wish to testify, you may send the  
12 testimony at [testimony@Council.NYC.gov](mailto:testimony@Council.NYC.gov). Again,  
13 that's [testimony@Council.NYC.gov](mailto:testimony@Council.NYC.gov). Thank you for your  
14 cooperation. We are ready to begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

16 [gavel]

17 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: I call this hearing  
18 to order and I want to thank you for joining our  
19 virtual hearing for the Committee on Immigration. I  
20 am Carlos Menchaca, Chair of the New York City  
21 Council's Committee on Immigration. Today, the  
22 Committee will be examining immigrant exclusion in  
23 COVID-19 responds. Additionally, the committee will  
24 be hearing six resolutions and I would also like to  
25 acknowledge my other colleagues who have joined us

2 here today. I see Council member Moya. I see  
3 Council member Dromm and Public Advocate Jumaane  
4 Williams here, as well. And is there anybody else?  
5 Council member Eugene is here. Wonderful. Thank you  
6 for joining. And any other members that I missed, I  
7 will bring them back later today. The resolutions  
8 before the committee are the following: resolution  
9 number 1399 sponsored by myself calls on the New York  
10 State legislature to pass in the governor design A  
11 10433 and S 5167 which would allow for the state  
12 agencies, municipalities, and authorities to provide  
13 state or local public benefits regardless of  
14 immigration status. Resolution number 1404 sponsored  
15 by Public Advocate Jumaane Williams calls on the  
16 United States Department of Justice to issue guidance  
17 that establishes protocols for the Executive Office  
18 of Immigration Review in times of public health  
19 crisis such as the SARS COVID-2 outbreak. Resolution  
20 1416 by Council member Mathieu Eugene calls on the  
21 United States Department of Homeland Security to halt  
22 all deportation proceedings for the length of COVID-  
23 19 pandemic and by the means of restricting the  
24 global spread of this disease. Resolution 1417 by  
25 Council member Mathieu Eugene calling on the

2 Department of Homeland Security to place a moratorium  
3 on all removal proceedings for employment base status  
4 holders that suffered a loss of employment during or  
5 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Resolution 1418 by  
6 Council member Mathieu Eugene calling on the United  
7 States Congress to pass and the president to sign  
8 legislation that would permit employment-based status  
9 holders to retain lawful status after loss of  
10 employment if such loss was related to the COVID-19  
11 pandemic. And, finally, resolution 1419 by Council  
12 member Moya calling on the United States Congress to  
13 pass and the president to sign legislation that would  
14 provide immigration relief for family members who  
15 [inaudible 00:03:46] lawful immigration status from a  
16 front-line worker who passed away due to COVID-19.  
17 And at this point I would like to ask Council member  
18 Moya to speak on his resolution before I talk about  
19 mine. Council member Moya? Are you ready?

20 COUNCIL MEMBER MOYA: Thank you, Chair.  
21 Thank you so much to allowing me the opportunity to  
22 go first. I appreciate it. And thank you so much  
23 for your thoughtfulness on all of the great  
24 resolutions that we have here in front of us. Good  
25 afternoon, everyone. Today, we will hear several

2 critical resolutions calling on the state and federal  
3 government to heed the call to help some of our most  
4 vulnerable and hardest hit by the COVID crisis that  
5 have been left in the cold. My resolution, number  
6 1419, calls on the United States Congress to pass and  
7 the president to sign legislation that would provide  
8 immigration relief for family members who drive  
9 lawful immigration status from a front-line worker  
10 who has passed away due to COVID-19. Nationally  
11 foreign-born individuals account for a large share of  
12 essential workers, including 17 percent of the  
13 healthcare workforce. While, in New York, the  
14 foreign-born share of the healthcare workforce is  
15 more than twice that of the national average. In  
16 fact, in New York, 47 percent of hospital medical  
17 staff in more than 79 percent of home health aides  
18 are foreign-born across the five boroughs. A large  
19 portion of foreign-born front-line workers in the  
20 healthcare profession are present in the United  
21 States on non-emigrating employment-based visas which  
22 are restrictive and require individuals to reapply  
23 showed circumstances warrant any changes of  
24 employment. Certain and nuclear family members may  
25 derive visas from a primary nonimmigrant visa holder,



2 but is the primary visa holder passes away, then all  
3 the family members under the derived visas must  
4 return to their countries of origin. In many cases,  
5 families on such visas have established lives in the  
6 United States with employment, schooling, and  
7 connections to local communities that make it very  
8 difficult to uproot and return to their countries of  
9 origin. It is imperative that Congress enact  
10 legislation to ensure that families do not lose their  
11 lawful status as a result of the fatal contraction of  
12 COVID-19 by their front-line working family members.  
13 We cannot turn our backs on the families of those who  
14 stepped up in our country's time of need. Those who  
15 acted as heroes. We need to honor and protect them.  
16 And I think you, Chair for the opportunity to have  
17 this resolution be introduced today. Thank you very  
18 much.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you for that  
20 work on that resolution. And I'm also looking  
21 forward to hearing from the public about all the  
22 resolutions. At this time, I would also like to ask  
23 Public Advocate Jumaane Williams to speak on his  
24 legislation.

2 PUBLIC ADVOCATE WILLIAMS: Thank you so  
3 much, Mr. Chair. As was mentioned, my name is  
4 Jumaane Williams. On the Public Advocate for the  
5 city of New York. Again, I want to thank Chair  
6 Menchaca and the members of the Committee on  
7 Immigration for holding this very important hearing  
8 today on the exclusion of immigrants in the COVID-19  
9 responds in a series of resolutions including one of  
10 mine. I would also like to thank Commissioner Bitta  
11 Mostofi for attending this hearing to provide  
12 information on what your office is doing to help our  
13 immigrant community. Today, the committee will hear  
14 resolutions calling on the state and federal  
15 government to provide protections to immigrants in  
16 the wake of COVID-19. I support all of my  
17 colleagues' efforts and I commend them for  
18 introducing these pieces of legislation. In response  
19 to the impact that the coronavirus has had on our  
20 health and our economy, our city, state, and federal  
21 government has taken steps to ensure that people  
22 continue to receive an income, live without fear of  
23 being evicted, and access testing for COVID-19, yet,  
24 immigrant communities have largely been left out of  
25 relief efforts that will protect their health and

2 wellbeing. These issues were evident when the pause  
3 executive order went into effect in March and there  
4 was no immediate guidance or immigration court  
5 proceedings. By resolution 1404 calls on the United  
6 States Department of Justice to issue guidance and  
7 established protocols for the executive order of  
8 emigration review or EOIR. During public health  
9 crisis such as the SARS COV-2 outbreak, these  
10 resolutions stem from a letter written in March to  
11 the director of EOIR for more than 100 legal service  
12 providers in New York with a voice to their concerns  
13 of clients' health being put at risk due to a  
14 requirement to still attend court proceedings.  
15 Removal hearings were never paused due to this  
16 pandemic, increasing the risk of being ordered to  
17 leave the United States, simply for failing to appear  
18 in court. Attorneys feared their clients would  
19 continue appearing in overcrowded courtrooms, even if  
20 they were exhibiting symptoms of the coronavirus.  
21 The concerns of legal providers were justified. The  
22 EOIR did not issue a clear guidance on how to handle  
23 court proceedings in the onset of the shelter in  
24 place which subsequently compromised the health and  
25 safety of respondents, their attorneys, witnesses,

2 members of their household, agency staff members, and  
3 a core of immigration judges, not to mention the  
4 entire city itself. To make matters worse, there  
5 were reports that posters on proper hand washing and  
6 other preventative health measures were ordered to be  
7 removed from the hallways of immigration court. It  
8 is very likely that this absence of guidance and  
9 structure contribute to the rise and positive  
10 coronavirus cases during the peak of the pandemic.  
11 As of now, the EOIR has posted a public health notice  
12 on their website with precautionary measures. The  
13 notice instructs individuals to wear a face covering  
14 to enter and remain in the EOIR space, not to enter  
15 if they have symptoms, or diagnosis of COVID-19. To  
16 practice social distancing and to practice proper  
17 hygiene by washing hands with soap and water or using  
18 alcohol-based sanitizer. While I appreciate the  
19 agency's efforts in posting this information on their  
20 website and making it available in 15 language,  
21 albeit several months too late, this only addresses  
22 part of the problem. There are still no clear  
23 instructions and options for filing documentation  
24 electronically which means many responders and their  
25 attorneys still have no choice but to attend in

2 person proceedings. Advocates and public defenders  
3 have expressed their frustration at the size limit of  
4 the EOIR's e-filing and the agency has said itself  
5 that I cannot provide technical support or  
6 confirmation that electronic filings are permitted  
7 for ongoing cases. There is a clear technical  
8 problem in the agency's operations that they have yet  
9 to fix. Last, but definitely not least, there is an  
10 apparent absence of oversight in assuring that each  
11 EOIR office across the country is following the same  
12 set of standards for filing procedures, information  
13 distribution, and hygienic practices. [inaudible  
14 00:10:28] of status may be a legal matter, but no  
15 human is illegal, therefore, it is our responsibility  
16 as elected officials to protect the health of every  
17 individual inside our borders. We do this by making  
18 sure that everyone has access to information in their  
19 native language, that paperwork can easily be filed  
20 electronically as we are still confined to a virtual  
21 world and that no one has to sacrifice their health  
22 to remain in this country. So, I just want to say  
23 thank you. Sadly, I don't expect much from this  
24 particular administration, but I'm glad that we have  
25 people on this call and I am thankful that the Chair

2 of this committee and for doing what we can to  
3 protect all of our residents. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, Public  
5 Advocate, for your advocacy on this. And when the  
6 city Council passes this, it will have the strength  
7 and power of the city of New York behind it. Thank  
8 you and we can hear from Council member Mathieu  
9 Eugene on your resolutions.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER EUGENE: Thank you very  
11 much, Chair Menchaca, for your leadership of the  
12 Immigration Committee during this very difficult time  
13 for all New Yorkers. And I also want to commend and  
14 think you, along with my colleagues on the  
15 Immigration Committee, for helping us protect the  
16 immigration community against the spread of COVID-19.  
17 As a public servant representing the majority and my  
18 grant in my district in Brooklyn, I am all too aware  
19 of the challenges and risks posed within our  
20 immigration system pertaining to the proper treatment  
21 of the deportees during the COVID-19 pandemic. There  
22 remains a major concern that the deportees, that may  
23 have contracted the COVID-19, are spreading this  
24 horrible disease upon their return to their country  
25 of origin unless more stringent safety measures are

2 put in place. That is why I'm sponsoring resolution  
3 1416 calling on the United States Department of  
4 Homeland Security to hold all the petitions presently  
5 for the length of the COVID-19 pandemic as a means of  
6 restricting the international transmission of this  
7 disease. We know that the Department of Homeland  
8 Security has already put in place measures that they  
9 feel appropriate to prevent, again, the spread of  
10 COVID-19, but, as with any infectious disease that  
11 has the ability to mutate [inaudible 00:13:11], it is  
12 important and that we take more precautions with  
13 deportees so that the transport does not become an  
14 even greater health risk to the contrary where they  
15 are returning to. This is a necessary measure that  
16 must be adopted by the Department of Homeland  
17 Security [inaudible 00:13:38] in the well-being of  
18 the United States, as well as the global community.  
19 In addition, I am sponsoring resolution 1417 calling  
20 on the United States Department of Homeland Security  
21 to place a moratorium on removal [inaudible 00:13:55]  
22 for employment base status folders that suffered  
23 [inaudible 00:14:03] due to the COVID-19 pandemic, as  
24 well as resolution 1418, the legislation that will  
25 permit employment base status holders to remain

2 lawful status after the loss of employment if such  
3 loss was related to COVID-19 pandemic. This public  
4 crisis has put a spotlight on the hard work and  
5 neighborhood of immigrant workers, many of whom are  
6 cabdrivers, essential workers, health professional,  
7 and small business owners. They are the strength of  
8 our local economy and they risk their lives to keep  
9 our city and our country moving forward during the  
10 worst part of this pandemic. Now, it is time when we  
11 must do everything that we can when we must do what  
12 is right to continue to protect our immigrant  
13 community from losing their legal status and facing  
14 removal presently due to circumstances beyond their  
15 control. And I want to thank [inaudible 00:15:14]  
16 Elizabeth Croft, Florentine Cabrori [sp?], Jeff  
17 Baker, Riley Crow, and all those wonderful  
18 colleagues, whether they are the staff of the city  
19 Council or my colleagues in government as city  
20 Council member. I want to thank all of you for your  
21 efforts, for your dedication, for your passion to  
22 continue to protect to the immigrant community and to  
23 you, Chair Menchaca. Thank you so much for your  
24 leadership. Thank you for your dedication and your  
25 passion in protecting our immigrant people because



2 they make the United States or the United States is  
3 about. They make New York City New York City and we  
4 cannot do nothing without them. Thank you so very  
5 much and God bless you all. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, Council  
7 member Mathieu Eugene from Brooklyn. And those are  
8 the sponsors and I just want to say how proud I am of  
9 this Council and all the staff that of work still  
10 needs resolutions. I am going to speak on my  
11 resolution, but, as you can see, the Immigration  
12 Committee has been hard at work really responding to  
13 this crisis when it comes to our immigrant  
14 communities. The reso I am introducing, 1399, I do  
15 not want to understate the meaning of this  
16 legislation currently being considered by the state  
17 legislature. We could be the first state in the  
18 nation to allow eligibility for state and local  
19 public benefits to be extended to all state  
20 residents, regardless of immigration status. Many  
21 advocates have asked to the Council to fund direct  
22 cash assistance for immigrant New Yorkers during the  
23 pandemic and this bill would not only allow us to  
24 provide this, it would be even more far-reaching.  
25 New York City could provide safety net benefits to

2 all residents, regardless of immigration status. In  
3 January, having no idea what lay before us, I opened  
4 our first committee hearing of the year by  
5 underscoring my firm belief that, when we discuss  
6 policies to care for our sick, protect our neighbors  
7 from bad landlords, or better educate our children,  
8 we aren't necessarily talking about immigrant New  
9 Yorkers. In this committee, which we have overseen  
10 the city's efforts to make life better, safer, and  
11 more affordable for all, we ask questions about how  
12 all policies affect immigrant New Yorkers, not  
13 because they are a special class to consider, but  
14 because they are New Yorkers. I, in this committee,  
15 have been focused on highlighting the gaps in  
16 services that immigrant New Yorkers face. And just  
17 in the past two years, we have discussed how  
18 immigrant New Yorkers often fear accessing healthcare  
19 due to cruel federal policies such as public charge.  
20 We have discussed the lack of adequate mental health  
21 services for immigrant communities and how to support  
22 immigrant run small businesses. We received data in  
23 annual reports from the Mayor's Office of Immigrant  
24 Affairs that highlights the disparities in health  
25 insurance, overcrowded living arrangements, and rent

2 burden and poverty in immigrant communities. And in  
3 these past six months, we've seen how all of these  
4 disparities have contributed to the disproportionate  
5 devastation that these COVID-19 pandemic has brought  
6 on our immigrant neighbors. Today, we are here to  
7 discuss lessons learned, what we need to do to better  
8 to prepare for potential of the second wave of COVID  
9 and what we can begin to envision her recovery.

10 While immigrants are disproportionately contracting  
11 COVID-19 and suffering fatal infections, with many  
12 dying in their homes in the spring, they were  
13 entirely forgotten by federal and state government  
14 entities. And, at the local level, clear and  
15 appropriate messaging regarding the virus and city  
16 services were disseminated unevenly. Often late and  
17 insufficient languages. Trusted voices from  
18 community-based organizations were suddenly unable to  
19 provide many of the services in person, told they  
20 were not considered essential for the purposes of  
21 contract reimbursement, or had to find new ways to  
22 reach their serviced population. Many of whom lack  
23 digital literacy. In terms of labor, immigrants are  
24 overrepresented in some of the industries that are  
25 vital to the COVID-19 pandemic corresponds, working

2 high rates and occupations within the healthcare,  
3 manufacturing, and agricultural fields and keeping  
4 essential businesses, like grocery stores and  
5 pharmacies, open amidst the crisis. Immigrants were  
6 also overrepresented in some of the highest  
7 industries, including hospitality and food services,  
8 construction work, and domestic work which suffered  
9 mass layoffs. I would be remiss if I didn't also  
10 mentioned that, before our city was struggling to  
11 survive, the full surge of the virus, a wave of anti-  
12 Asian racism took root affecting New Yorkers across  
13 the five boroughs. At the same time, the federal  
14 government has not slowed down its deportation  
15 program or substantially altered its approach to  
16 criminalizing and attacking our own. This virus and  
17 the many ways it has infiltrated our communities and  
18 upended our lives will be with us for a very long  
19 time to come and it is critical that we take stock of  
20 where we are and how we are surviving that right now  
21 and what more we can do to ensure that immigrant New  
22 Yorkers are integral to the city's recovery plan. I  
23 look forward to hear from many of you who are here  
24 today. We're going to hear from a panel before we  
25 hear from the Mayor's Office, but I expect to hear

2 opportunities for collaboration and continued work  
3 with this administration. And with the current  
4 crisis is far from over and as our minds are set  
5 beyond 2020, the ways in which our city is now  
6 recovering are also impossible to envision in April  
7 and in May and that gives me hope. Want to thank my  
8 staff who has continued to understand this.

9 Committee counsel Harbani Ahujah [sp?], policy  
10 analyst Elizabeth Cronk, chief of staff Lorena  
11 Lucero, legislative director Caesar Vargas, and my  
12 communications director, Tony Chorito. And with  
13 that, I'm going to hand it over to committee counsel  
14 Harbani Ahuja to go over some procedural items and--

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair.

16 My name is Harbani Ahuja and I am counsel to the  
17 Committee on Immigration for the New York City  
18 Counsel. Before we begin, I want to remind everyone  
19 that you will be on mute until you are called on to  
20 testify when you will be unmuted by the host. I will  
21 be calling on panelists to testify. Please listen to  
22 your name to be called. I will be periodically  
23 announcing who the next panelist will be. The first  
24 panel will consist of members of the public. Next,  
25 we will hear from members of the administration

2 followed by advocates and additional of the public.  
3 All hearing participants should submit written  
4 testimony to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). I'd like to  
5 remind everyone that, unlike our typical counsel  
6 hearings, we will be calling on individuals one by  
7 one to testify. Each panelist will be given three  
8 minutes to speak. Please start once the Sergeant has  
9 started the time. Council members who have questions  
10 for a particular panelist should use the raise hand  
11 function in zoom and I will call on you after the  
12 panelist has completed their testimony. For  
13 panelists, once your name is called, a member of our  
14 staff will unmute you and the Sergeant-at-arms will  
15 give you the go-ahead to begin upon signing the  
16 timer. Please wait for the Sergeant to announce that  
17 you may begin before delivering your testimony. We  
18 have an interpreter that will be providing  
19 simultaneous interpretation in Spanish during this  
20 panel. Can the interpreter please be unmuted?

21 INTERPRETER: Okay.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Mr. Jauregui, could  
23 you please translate the following instructions and  
24 also instruct the panelists that you will be  
25 providing simultaneous translation so that they may

2 take pauses as they speak. I would now like to  
3 welcome William Asian to testify.

4 INTERPRETER: [Speaking Spanish]

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: After William, I  
6 will be calling on Maribel Torres.

7 INTERPRETER: [Speaking Spanish]

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Followed by Jesus  
9 Benavidez.

10 INTERPRETER: [Speaking Spanish]

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: And the Enoc  
12 Evangelista.

13 INTERPRETER: [Speaking Spanish]

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. William  
15 Asian, you may begin.

16 INTERPRETER: [Speaking Spanish]

17 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will begin  
18 now.

19 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

20 INTERPRETER: Hello. Good morning.

21 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

22 INTERPRETER: My name is William for taking  
23 me into account.

24 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

25

2 INTERPRETER: I'm going to say a few words  
3 in the language which is Spanish.

4 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

5 INTERPRETER: I didn't hear--

6 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

7 INTERPRETER: I'm not hearing William  
8 Asian.

9 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

10 INTERPRETER: Good afternoon to everybody.

11 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

12 INTERPRETER: And thank you for the  
13 opportunity to represent my community.

14 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

15 INTERPRETER: This salutation was  
16 [inaudible 00: 26:11] first Mayan languages.

17 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

18 INTERPRETER: There are a lot of people  
19 from Guatemala of Mayan decent--

20 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

21 INTERPRETER: that we work in the city of  
22 New York.

23 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

24 INTERPRETER: my name is William Asian. I  
25 am a member of the project [Speaking Spanish].



2 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

3 INTERPRETER: We are essential workers and  
4 we were given up-- deliver food due to the pandemic.

5 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

6 INTERPRETER: I give thanks to the  
7 Immigration Committee of the City of New York.

8 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

9 INTERPRETER: In order for the voices of  
10 the people who do delivery may be heard.

11 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

12 INTERPRETER: In 2011, I came from  
13 Guatemala. I immigrated in order to find a better  
14 life for me.

15 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

16 INTERPRETER: When I work in the city  
17 without any knowledge of English was very difficult  
18 for me to find a job.

19 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

20 INTERPRETER: The only options I've go for  
21 a living is to work in restaurants.

22 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

23 INTERPRETER: Before the pandemic, I worked  
24 full time as a delivery man in a restaurant in  
25 Manhattan.

2 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

3 INTERPRETER: And the pandemic changed our  
4 lives. The delivery people like myself are the ones  
5 who suffer the most.

6 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

7 INTERPRETER: I love my job.

8 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

9 INTERPRETER: My full-time job, because the  
10 restaurant where I was working, closed for more than  
11 a month.

12 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

13 INTERPRETER: Being excluded of every kind  
14 of official aide, I had to, of course, to my own  
15 savings to survive.

16 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

17 INTERPRETER: To survive to be able to pay  
18 my rent, to feed myself, and there was a fear of  
19 being infected myself with COVID.

20 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

21 INTERPRETER: I didn't have the option  
22 during the confinement to stay home. I had to go out  
23 to work as a delivery man for food and for  
24 restaurants.

25 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

2 INTERPRETER: And many of us who were  
3 forced to work as delivery people, home delivery  
4 people for food.

5 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

6 INTERPRETER: Through the site, many sites  
7 like Doorman, [inaudible 00:31:07], etc.

8 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

9 INTERPRETER: These platforms that offer  
10 service online changed completely our lives.

11 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

12 INTERPRETER: We have to face the very  
13 different and crude reality working for these  
14 platforms.

15 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

16 INTERPRETER: During the pandemic, in order  
17 to earn a little more than 400 dollars, many of us  
18 had to work more than 50 hours a week.

19 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

20 INTERPRETER: There were many abuses we  
21 suffered. For instances, many of us had to buy our  
22 own bikes.

23 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

24 INTERPRETER: We had to buy our own  
25 protective gear like helmets, gloves, masks, lights.

2 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

3 INTERPRETER: These site online steal from  
4 us our tips most of the time.

5 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

6 INTERPRETER: Many times, without  
7 opportunity to outport our tips, these platforms just  
8 prevent us to get it.

9 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

10 INTERPRETER: These platforms just block  
11 you and prevent you from working every time a client  
12 makes a negative review of you.

13 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

14 INTERPRETER: Without the opportunity to  
15 defend ourselves to these platforms take from us the  
16 opportunity to work without any kind of defense on  
17 our part.

18 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

19 INTERPRETER: As a result, the work is more  
20 and more unstable.

21 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

22 INTERPRETER: And much riskier because many  
23 of us has to face more and more violence in our work.

24 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

25

2 INTERPRETER: They tried to steal our bikes  
3 which is our tool within our work.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [Speaking Spanish].  
5 I'm just saying thank you to William for his  
6 testimony and if he wrote out the rest of testimony,  
7 we want it officially submitted to the city Council.  
8 [Speaking Spanish].

9 WILLIAM ASIAN: [Speaking Spanish]

10 INTERPRETER: Thank you very much for  
11 hearing me and it's a good opportunity that our  
12 voices are being heard by the community. Thank you  
13 very much.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
16 testimony and thank you, Mr. Jauregui, for the  
17 translation. Next, I'd like to call on Maribel  
18 Torres and then Jesus Benavidez to testify who will  
19 be accompanied by Yesenia Mata for translation.  
20 Thank you.

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will begin  
22 now.

23 MARIBEL TORRES: [Speaking Spanish]

24 YESENIA MATA: My name is Maribel  
25 Torres. I am a member of La Colmena and I live in

2 Staten Island. The date that the city shut down, I  
3 was working as a domestic worker. During that week,  
4 I was asked to deep clean certain homes. While deep  
5 cleaning some of those homes, I worried deeply about  
6 getting sick, not just because of COVID-19, but also  
7 because of the chemicals that I was using to deep  
8 clean. They are hazardous chemicals that can cause  
9 damage to my health. Many of us immigrant women who  
10 are domestic workers are being used to do this type  
11 of work and we continue being excluded and ignored by  
12 this administration and the governor. As the city  
13 has been opening up, part by part, who do you think  
14 is being asked to continue doing the deep cleaning?  
15 Me. The immigrant domestic worker. And I worry  
16 about my life. As a mother, as always, as an  
17 essential worker, I asked not to be excluded from any  
18 economic relief. We deserve a fund that will support  
19 the efforts we have contributed to keep the city  
20 running. I also ask for this administration and this  
21 governor to understand the fundamental piece that we  
22 are so the city can continue working. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [Speaking Spanish]

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: I would not like to  
25 call on Jesus Benavidez to testify.

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will begin  
3 now.

4 JESUS BENAVIDEZ: [Speaking Spanish]

5 YESENIA MATA: My name is Jesus  
6 Benavidez and I am part of the labor committee group  
7 in La Colmena. I work and live in Staten Island.  
8 Before the pandemic began, many of the immigrant  
9 workers were in unfair situations. During this  
10 pandemic, things got worse. The day laborers were  
11 the first who are not paid. We were the first to  
12 lose our jobs, but we were also the first to help the  
13 city continue functioning. Despite these risks, it  
14 was us, the day laborers, who took risks day by day  
15 and without the proper safety equipment to support  
16 our families. We have lost several colleagues in  
17 recent months and not only because of what is  
18 happening, but also because they have continuous  
19 illnesses that they cannot take care of due to the  
20 lack of health insurance. As an essential worker, I  
21 ask you do not exclude me from any economic relief.  
22 The day laborers deserve a fund. They deserve  
23 support for all the contributions that they have  
24 provided to this city. Thanks.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [Speaking Spanish]  
3 Harbani?

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
5 testimony. Next, we would like to call on Enoc  
6 Evangelista to testify. Mr. Jauregui, could you  
7 please provide interpretation for Mr. Evangelista.

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has began.

9 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

10 INTERPRETER: Good afternoon. My name is  
11 Enoc Evangelista.

12 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

13 INTERPRETER: I'm from Mexico.

14 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

15 INTERPRETER: I used to work in a  
16 restaurant.

17 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

18 INTERPRETER: I used-- I was paid weekly.

19 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

20 INTERPRETER: Since the pan--

21 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

22 INTERPRETER: the only pay me [inaudible

23 00:43:17] week and since then I didn't have money for  
24 anything.

25 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]



2 INTERPRETER: I had to refer to-- In order  
3 to survive, I had to refer to a center.

4 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

5 INTERPRETER: In order to survive the  
6 pandemic.

7 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

8 INTERPRETER: Right now, I'm working as a  
9 delivery man.

10 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

11 INTERPRETER: And I'm scared of being  
12 infected.

13 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

14 INTERPRETER: I'm scared and, to be honest  
15 with you, the pay is very low.

16 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

17 INTERPRETER: I work seven days a week.

18 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

19 INTERPRETER: Since dawn until sunset--

20 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

21 INTERPRETER: in order to eat.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [Speaking Spanish]

23 There's an issue. There's a lag time from the  
24 translator and I'm hearing it-- is there someone  
25 with Enoc-- [Speaking Spanish] Okay. I think we

2 might've fixed what's happening. Can we try again  
3 with the translator? With Jorge? [Speaking Spanish]

4 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

5 INTERPRETER: We, as immigrants, we also  
6 have the right or rights--

7 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

8 INTERPRETER: to be treated fairly as  
9 anyone else.

10 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

11 INTERPRETER: I'm discriminated for being  
12 Mexican.

13 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

14 INTERPRETER: And not being able to speak  
15 English.

16 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

17 INTERPRETER: That's why I ask, as a  
18 favor--

19 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

20 INTERPRETER: that what has been said today  
21 could help us--

22 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

23 INTERPRETER: to help us to be equal to  
24 everybody else.

25 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

2 INTERPRETER: I thank you all--

3 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

4 INTERPRETER: for hearing me.

5 ENOC EVANGELISTA: [Speaking Spanish]

6 INTERPRETER: Thank you very much.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [Speaking Spanish]

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Mr.

9 Evangelista, for the testimony. And thank you, Mr.

10 Jauregui, for the translation. I will now call on

11 Council members for questions in the order they have

12 used the zoom raised hand function. Council members,

13 if you would like to ask a question and you have not

14 yet used the zoom raise hand function, please do so

15 now. Seeing no hands, we'll move on to the next

16 panel. We will now call on representatives from the

17 Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to testify. MOIA

18 testimony will be provided by MOIA Commissioner Bitta

19 Mostofi. Additionally, director of policy and

20 legislative initiatives, Jean Bay, will be available

21 for answering questions. As a reminder, during the

22 hearing, if Council members would like to ask a

23 question of the administration or of a specific

24 panelist, please use the zoom raise hand function and

25 I will call on you in order. Before we begin, I will

2 administer the oath. Commissioner Mostofi and Jean  
3 Bay, I will call on you each individually for a  
4 response. Please raise your right hands. Do you  
5 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and  
6 nothing but the truth in your testimony before this  
7 committee and to respond honestly to Council member  
8 questions? Commissioner Mostofi?

9 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yes. I do.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Jean  
11 Bay?

12 JEAN BAY: Yes. I do.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you.

14 Commissioner, you may begin when you are ready.

15 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Thank you so much.

16 And, first, happy citizenship and constitution day to  
17 everyone. It's certainly a moment of recognition  
18 about the importance of all of our engagement and the  
19 voices of every New Yorker, as we just all from the  
20 first panel being heard and acted upon. I want to  
21 thank Chair Menchaca, members of the community and  
22 Public Advocate Williams for inviting me to testify  
23 today. My name is Bitta Mostofi. I'm the  
24 Commissioner for the Mayor's Office of Immigrant  
25 Affairs. The last six months have been filled with

2 hardship and anguish for immigrant communities. The  
3 COVID-19 crisis has pushed city government to its  
4 limits as we work with many partners to provide  
5 necessary services that New Yorkers need to survive.  
6 Despite these challenges, it is imperative for this  
7 city to continue to work to close gaps and  
8 specifically to focus on serving excluded and  
9 marginalized communities. In this context, I am  
10 deeply grateful for the opportunity to focus on this  
11 important topic. I have submitted a much larger full  
12 testimony for the record and, for this hearing, I  
13 will share brief remarks about federal failures to  
14 address the needs of our communities and highlight  
15 some of the steps that we take in as a city to help  
16 close those gaps. The coronavirus has laid bare  
17 long-standing racial disparities across our city. We  
18 know that black and Latin X New Yorkers have  
19 disproportionately suffered the harms of the pandemic  
20 due to the effects of structural and institutional  
21 racism. We have also seen how an atmosphere of hate,  
22 perpetuated by federal leadership has negatively  
23 affected Asian American communities who are facing  
24 biased motivated attacks and economic devastation.  
25 Immigrants have also been disproportionately impacted

2 by the virus. Our own internal analysis has found  
3 the higher the makeup of immigrant or non-citizens  
4 there are per zip code, the higher the COVID-19 case  
5 and death rates are in that area. In addition,  
6 immigrant workers in the city, particularly  
7 undocumented workers, have been disproportionately  
8 affected by the economic turmoil brought on by this  
9 pandemic. We estimate that about 60 percent of  
10 undocumented workers have already lost their job or  
11 are at risk of losing their job due to the pandemic,  
12 compared to address 36 percent of all workers. Even  
13 as our immigrant communities have been wracked with  
14 pain and economic struggles, the federal government  
15 has failed to address this urgent need. Undocumented  
16 immigrants and mixed status families were excluded  
17 from the direct stimulus payments provided. The end  
18 insurance programs, including federal subsidies, are  
19 limited to those who are work authorized. Moreover,  
20 because of legal restrictions on the public benefits  
21 and grass that immigrants can access, immigrants have  
22 been unable to access many services on the state and  
23 local level that would've provided support during  
24 this unprecedented crisis. If that were not enough,  
25 the Trump administration has chosen this moment to

2 push calamitous lies about immigrants and expand an  
3 anti-immigrant agenda. ICE has refused to halt  
4 immigration enforcement activities contributing to  
5 COVID-19 within detention centers and globally. The  
6 Trump administration has also relentlessly attacked  
7 working-class immigrants through a variety of policy  
8 changes over the past few months. The most obvious  
9 example of this are the public charge rule changes  
10 which have led to deep confusion and reluctance to  
11 seek services among our communities. The Trump  
12 administration has pushed out a host of additional  
13 policy changes during this crisis, including a few  
14 changes, restrictions on asylum eligibility, and  
15 more. Recognizing the failure of the federal  
16 government to meet the needs of New Yorkers and its  
17 relentless attacks on communities, we have worked to  
18 close the gap and provide much-needed services to  
19 help alleviate the harms during this pandemic in a  
20 myriad of ways. In June, my office worked with the  
21 Department of Health to launch an ad campaign called  
22 seek care without fear that emphasized that it is  
23 safe to seek COVID-19 testing and care, emergency  
24 Medicaid, food assistance, tenant protection, and  
25 legal help regardless of immigration status or

2 ability to pay. Campaign messaging was included in  
3 all of our outreach and digital engagement and  
4 translated into 25 languages. MOIA also led the  
5 city's thinking on how to incorporate language access  
6 into every part of COVID response. Language and  
7 other barriers make it particularly difficult for  
8 immigrant communities to access the information that  
9 they need. From the beginning of the pandemic, our  
10 focus was to communicate necessary information to all  
11 New Yorkers so that they could access city services.  
12 We activated the language access task force to assess  
13 the challenges of the crisis. We provided guidance  
14 and technical assistance to members of the task force  
15 on best practices and hosted to convening's with  
16 agencies language access coordinators to address  
17 specific agency challenges. In addition, our team  
18 delivered an almost six fold increase and  
19 translations compared to last year. MOIA remained  
20 open and continues to provide services with  
21 modifications and operations to ensure staff and  
22 clients both remain safe during the pandemic. While  
23 IDNYC enrollment sites have been temporarily closed,  
24 online renewals continue to be processed and we are  
25 in the process of phasing in a reopening plan for



2 physical science. Our community services team  
3 remains more active than ever, fielding constituent  
4 concerns and calls. Our call volume has drastically  
5 increased from just 209 calls in the first three  
6 months of the year to nearly 4000 calls between April  
7 and August. Our legal services providers have  
8 adjusted their focus with supplemental funding to  
9 address additional complications due to the COVID-19  
10 worlds. Specifically, we were able to allocate funds  
11 to the rapid response collaborative to assist and  
12 represent immigrants detained during the pandemic.  
13 Similarly, in light of the particularly severe  
14 effects of COVID-19 on low income immigrants, we  
15 provided approximately 200,000 dollars to cover  
16 application fees for those who were unable to pay  
17 their filing fees at this moment. In addition, we  
18 provided funding to cover DACA renewal fees for  
19 approximately 300 DACA applications. The city also  
20 partnered with the Open Society Foundation to create  
21 the COVID-19 immigrant emergency relief program.  
22 With a 20 million dollar grant, it will allow us to  
23 provide direct payments of between 401,000 dollars  
24 for individuals and their families in partnership  
25 with community-based providers across our city. This

2 funding has provided critical infusion of funds for  
3 family is, but addresses only a fraction of the need  
4 in our city. In addition, we have used interest in  
5 this program to connect immigrant families to other  
6 resources and programs that are available to them.

7 We also supported the Mayors Fund and Human Resources  
8 Administration to secure private funding to help New  
9 Yorkers, regardless of status, receive assistance to  
10 pay their funeral expenses for loved ones. The

11 COVID-19 burial assistance program helped address the  
12 exclusion of immigrant families from the state and  
13 city use existing program. Then, NYC staff have been  
14 reassigned to this program to help with intake, given  
15 our extensive experience working with immigrant  
16 families. Health access is more important than ever  
17 during a global pandemic and we have worked

18 consistently with our partners at New York City  
19 Health and Hospitals on a variety of health access  
20 initiatives, including the Testing Trace program and  
21 the expansion of NYC Care and advance of that  
22 program. Finally, we work closely with a variety of

23 city partners to reach immigrant New Yorkers about  
24 COVID-19 specific guidance and programming that the  
25 city or other government actors had created in

2 response to the pandemic. As I ends, I want to take  
3 a moment to recognize the crucial, backbreaking work  
4 that community-based organizations have taken on  
5 during this time. On their own and, in many ways,  
6 and partnerships with the city. Without their help,  
7 much of the work that we have done to serve the  
8 immigrant communities left out of federal relief  
9 would not have been possible. They, too, have been  
10 pushed to the breaking point in the wake of this  
11 emergency. It is the fundamental responsibility of  
12 government to ensure that our community's needs are  
13 met. And, for this reason, MOIA will continue to  
14 work with our community providers, stakeholders, and  
15 partners to help address the real needs expressed,  
16 certainly, by your first panel, but that what we have  
17 heard repeatedly from community use that we work  
18 with. Thank you, again, for calling this hearing and  
19 I look forward to answering your questions.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you,  
21 Commissioner, for your testimony. I will now turn it  
22 over to questions from Chair Menchaca. Commissioner,  
23 please state unmute it, if possible, during the  
24 question-and-answer period. Thank you. Chair  
25 Menchaca, please begin.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank  
3 you, Commissioner. It has been a while since we have  
4 been together like this and so I just want to say  
5 thank you and I hope you are healthy, you and your  
6 family.

7 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Thank you.  
8 Likewise.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Recharged. There  
10 is a lot of work ahead of us and so I welcome our  
11 partnership in full steam. And I just want to  
12 acknowledge to the first panel and their words were  
13 incredibly impactful. I think both you and I both  
14 have heard these stories on the ground. It's really  
15 important for people to listen to that in their  
16 native language. I know that the language access  
17 and, even as we struggled through the language access  
18 and translation, it becomes a thing that we all can  
19 try to make better in this world. And the most  
20 important thing is that their voices are heard. And  
21 so, thank you for your patience and compassion as we  
22 move through this. My first question is related to  
23 the incredible work that you have done and you have  
24 kind of seen the city activate. What were the actual  
25 programs and services that MOIA suspended during

2 March and April and really throughout the pandemic?  
3 Can you kind of walk us through the things that were  
4 shut down? You talked about ID NYC and some other  
5 things, but, give us a sense of about what actually  
6 stopped.

7                   COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Sure. I am happy  
8 to say nothing fully stopped. Everything had a pivot  
9 or transition and the thing that was really like  
10 fully halted was our ability to do in person ID NYC  
11 enrollment. For many obvious reasons, but, for those  
12 less aware, you know, we, as you know, designed this  
13 program to be co-located at locations where we know  
14 immigrant dents communities are using services or  
15 benefits and when all of our host sites closed, we  
16 were left with no option but to also close. And we  
17 have been spending a lot of time to assess both the  
18 safety needs of our staff, but also the host sites  
19 and the public as we reopen. And we hope to have  
20 more to share there. We did have it a whole team to  
21 focus on renewals by phone, which is really amazing.  
22 So, contacting, I think, at this point, it's over  
23 25,000 New Yorkers to remind them of their ability to  
24 renew, helping people through that process, and a  
25 myriad of other ways in which we continue renewal

2 online. And so, the additional programming-- So, I  
3 will start with legal initiatives. So, our Action  
4 NYC program, in particular, all of the sort of  
5 initial screenings pivoted to telephone or telephonic  
6 initial screenings. So, all of our providers  
7 adjusted swiftly to move there sort of intake or  
8 screening process telephonically. They have  
9 continued in this manner is the start of the stay-at-  
10 home order, but kind of come to the office as needed  
11 for paperwork and things like that. So, those  
12 services remain. We saw an initial dip in  
13 utilization of our hotline for obvious reasons, I  
14 think, in March. It may be a little bit of April,  
15 but then it spiked again. We actually made a  
16 concerted effort to get the word out that the hotline  
17 was still active and available, that people could  
18 still reach out. And we saw those numbers go back up  
19 and certainly spike recently when kind of big  
20 decisions have come down like DACA and public charge  
21 decisions.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Can we hone in on  
23 the hotline? I'm really interested in that spike of  
24 re-engagement and what--

25 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: questions were you  
3 fielding from the hotline?

4 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: capture. So our  
5 Action NYC hotline, which is run by Catholic  
6 Charities, our partner on the ground, we worked with  
7 them to just, you know, ensure that it was operable  
8 and had moved safely to continue operations. And  
9 that was true pretty immediately. So, there wasn't a  
10 gap in service there. But I think, like with all New  
11 Yorkers-- and we have talked extensively with them  
12 about this and with our legal services providers,  
13 those initial months, you know, people weren't  
14 reaching out for the first time immigration  
15 consultation, for example. Right? It was really  
16 about people's survival and safety. So, I don't  
17 think any of us were shocked that we saw some lower  
18 than average numbers, but we did want to ensure that  
19 the fact that we remained open was something that New  
20 Yorkers were aware of. So, my team actually worked  
21 on a concerted campaign to get that information out  
22 and we saw those numbers go back up and then we saw  
23 spikes as key decisions came down and we were, again,  
24 sort of pushing out the availability of the hotline  
25 for information. I would say still kind of DACA,

2 public charge and sort of the perennial questions  
3 that we have been seeing the most of remain the same.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And I just want to  
5 get on what you are talking about. Like the  
6 survival. Were people calling about food? Those  
7 kind of nonlegal, non-DACA specific issues?

8 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: So, I just want to  
9 separate two things. The Action NYC legal helpline,  
10 which is really designed and intended to be migration  
11 counselors that can assist folks with specifically  
12 immigration and legal questions or connect folks to  
13 appointments with our legal service provider network  
14 versus our constituent services line which you heard  
15 me testify saw just a dramatic spike. Right? And,  
16 again, part of that was a response and an effort on  
17 our part recognizing challenges either do language  
18 Jack says, due to just like competency and immigrant-  
19 specific needs. We pushed out with much greater  
20 intentionality our direct line for folks instead of  
21 sort of recommending necessarily always having to go  
22 through 311 or to connect with a particular other  
23 agency. Our team could assist folks is sort of  
24 assistance in case managing them to different needs.  
25 We saw a huge number of requests come through their



2 related to what you are identifying. So, food as  
3 being sort of near the top emergency relief near the  
4 top, health access and testing near the top amongst  
5 others.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Got it. Is there  
7 something that you can give us in terms of the kind  
8 of clarity at the request? I'm thankful that you  
9 kind of separated both of what we will call the  
10 Action NYC hotline and then the constituent cases.  
11 Is there some reporting that you can give us in terms  
12 of what is coming in really identifying what that  
13 spike was percentage wise? I don't know if you have  
14 any of that data in front of you, but we can move on  
15 through the questions if that is something that you  
16 can get to us later.

17 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah. Sure. I  
18 think I hit it, but I am happy to sort of identify  
19 more and get back to you with greater specifics on  
20 numbers.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah. I mean, are  
22 we talking about three times? I think what we really  
23 want to understand is what you all got in terms of  
24 the asks and what those asks were.

25 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: I mean, haven't  
3 heard a number yet about how many calls. And if you  
4 have that, that would be great.

5 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah. So, I  
6 testified to the number of calls. So, nearly 4000  
7 between April and August with additional callers that  
8 we received voicemails from and returned. So, just a  
9 huge increase in volume that came through our  
10 hotline. Again, the number one request around  
11 emergency relief. Secondarily around food and then,  
12 thirdly, around health access. But we can get you,  
13 you know, a more clear breakdown.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Awesome. Thank  
15 you. I would appreciate that. Let's move over to  
16 the sentences. The self-response rate and the  
17 nonresponse follow-up. And, to this day, I think  
18 we're all looking at a really devastating number and  
19 rate in general. How has MOIA participated in  
20 activities to ensure the complete count and can you  
21 talk to us a little bit about what you might be doing  
22 in the next few days?

23 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah. So, this has  
24 been a priority of our office and our work, including  
25 during this pandemic, to ensure that we are working

2 in partnership with the census team, as well as all  
3 of our communities stakeholders on getting the word  
4 out. So, I can speak a little bit to what we have  
5 been doing. Our team produced 16 of our own videos  
6 in different languages to encourage folks to  
7 participate in the census and to give key messaging  
8 and information. These were disseminated in  
9 different sort of more intentional ways through sort  
10 of things like Whats App or Kakao Chat, right? Being  
11 really intentional about how we were disseminating  
12 this information at this moment and no way that was  
13 save, but also received by the intended audiences.  
14 We have also conducted regular sort of virtual  
15 sentences days of action. The team has done, I  
16 think, at this point, over 100+ town halls. The  
17 sense this has always included in those engagements  
18 as a key effort or priority. We regularly  
19 participate sort of days of action. So, getting out  
20 there, right. So, particularly, at this moment,  
21 whether it is that food pantries or subway stations,  
22 testing-- sort of outside testing locations. The  
23 team is been engaged in those activities and  
24 coordinated with the census team. We have been doing  
25 weekly phone banks. If you want to participate in

2 one, let us know. Where the team comes to gather as  
3 MOIA, as community partners with community members,  
4 and we reads roughly about 2500 folks a week through  
5 that effort. There have also been doing texting  
6 efforts. So, using different kind of platforms like  
7 hustle to kind of get the word out and support the  
8 efforts of the census team. Those are some of the  
9 ways that we have done 2020 census engagement. I  
10 have joined some press conferences and other efforts,  
11 as well. And we certainly continue and plan to  
12 continue all of those efforts and sort of amplifying  
13 those of others until September 30. Including today  
14 with the citizenship video and I hope that encourages  
15 people to do the sentences.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Awesome. Thank  
17 you. And, clearly, there is a gap here in reaching  
18 our community. And I think the target for immigrant  
19 communities is going to be really fierce and needed  
20 for us. And we just haven't gotten the numbers that  
21 I think we all expected. We put so many resources  
22 and strategy around this and we have still yet to  
23 pull it in. Council member Moya and I represent some  
24 of the lowest rates right now and it's just  
25 difficult. So, I just hope-- and I think a lot of

2 the stuff that you spoke to in the census was stuff  
3 that we have already deployed. And, yet, we have not  
4 seen the response. And so, I just hope we have more  
5 strategy as we move closer to the end because  
6 everything that we feared is on its way and this is  
7 not even talking about the election. This is just  
8 talking about the census [inaudible 01:11:46]. And  
9 so, I would love to spend some time with you on the  
10 phone and talk through some of the and how we can  
11 really focus on that together.

12 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Sounds great. And  
13 if there are efforts in Sunset Park or other areas  
14 where we can be helpful, please let us know. I think  
15 we are all ears then, certainly, creative and  
16 innovative ideas are all well, this time.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And we need  
18 innovation and something new because everything we  
19 are putting out there, it's just not working and what  
20 it did-- we just need something new.

21 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: So, the only thing  
22 I will say to that is that it is working a little  
23 bit, right? I think people are doing really  
24 incredible things, particularly, the providers that  
25 the city and the Council and administration together

2 supported. Right? They are doing innovative videos.  
3 They are doing door-to-door. They are doing one on  
4 one. And I think all of that is really tremendous  
5 and we have seen the upticks and undercounted areas  
6 and I really-- you know, testament to the census  
7 team itself, I think that has a lot to do with just a  
8 dramatic shift in how they were doing their outreach  
9 and engagement.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes. All true and  
11 we just-- we're not there yet. Let's go into  
12 language access because I think that is going to be  
13 an important thing as we think about the impact.  
14 There have been plenty of rumors and misinformation  
15 about COVID-19 itself circulating on social media and  
16 mobile apps and manipulating public opinion and  
17 creating false narratives for folks. These are  
18 pretty dangerous, I think, and everything that is  
19 kind of coming through the officials and health care.  
20 How is MOIA working right now to combat that  
21 directly?

22 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: So, I will say a  
23 couple of things. In terms of language access, you  
24 know, this is an area and an issue that I think we  
25 both deeply care about and have paid a lot of

2 attention to predating this moment, but certainly  
3 more so, even more so, at this moment. I think, to  
4 answer your question of part of how to address that  
5 was how do we get information out more swiftly and  
6 with greater quality, right? That is something that  
7 we have focused on in general, as a priority, and the  
8 language access work, is how to increase the quality  
9 of the translations and the work that is put out.  
10 And, as I noted in my testimony, and initial part of  
11 the work of the task force was to identify how to  
12 better support agencies in ensuring that these  
13 critical messages, which were coming down, you know,  
14 just rapidly, were ones that were affectively  
15 disseminated and shared in many languages. One of  
16 the initial things that we did as a task force was  
17 actually recommended that the Department of Health  
18 move away from translation in 10 languages and  
19 expanded to 25. And that happened rapidly. We also  
20 encouraged and worked alongside them in thinking  
21 about-- again, thinking about innovation and being  
22 creative about how information is being shared or  
23 recognition. That literacy is also a challenge,  
24 right? Not just English proficiency. And so,  
25 creation of videos and voiceovers and digital voice

2 messaging is an additional sort of tactic that can be  
3 used in disseminating information. They have done an  
4 incredible job with that. We worked with Health and  
5 Hospitals in creating a video around the hotel and  
6 program because we heard so many questions about it  
7 and what it looked like and what it meant. And we  
8 further looked at leveraging sword of the tools that  
9 our team had developed, including sort of tools  
10 around consistency with translation. So, us kind of  
11 keeping a more quality assurance barometer on  
12 keywords and messaging around COVID so that there was  
13 consistency sort of a cross utilization and  
14 leveraging contracts to do-- you know, and me sort  
15 of 48 hour translations for key messages and short  
16 sort of languages that we disseminated through our  
17 networks, through digital media, through all the  
18 different platforms, and ways in which we were  
19 getting information out. And then, lastly, I would  
20 say that we worked really closely to ensure that our  
21 sort of infrastructure that we developed was of sort  
22 of most use or easy use for limited and English  
23 proficient New Yorkers. So, we developed a COVID  
24 immigrant resource guide that we housed on our  
25 website that we continue both to update. The guide



2 itself, but also a frequently asked question based on  
3 what we are hearing from communities. Questions  
4 around a particular service or needs and what we did  
5 was something we had been working on but had an sort  
6 of turned the green light on until the pandemic was  
7 we have been working on sort of piloting a website  
8 interpretation tool that is human translation. So,  
9 sort of higher quality than Google translate. And,  
10 at least, the top 10 languages. We turned to that on  
11 in March, at the end of March. So, our website and  
12 the guide itself is human translated in the city's  
13 top 10 and then we have permanently translated into  
14 25 languages. And that, we saw huge spikes on our  
15 website in different languages.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Now, did you is  
17 CBO's and kind of how [inaudible 01:17:28]  
18 communities, immigrant communities? And then, the  
19 other piece to that is how did you understand the  
20 effective nature of the pieces? I get that a lot of  
21 folks were kind of engaging you on the download side,  
22 but were you able to get feedback and how were you  
23 able to measure that efficiency of the message?

24 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: I missed the first  
25 part of what you said. Kind of cut out a little bit.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Were you working  
3 with CBO's to help? You talked a lot about the city  
4 agencies that you were connecting with. Were any  
5 CBO's tapped to help develop the messaging?

6 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: We worked really  
7 closely with community-based providers. I would say  
8 my team on a daily basis-- almost on a daily basis--  
9 elevated key issues or feedback that they were  
10 receiving from their engagements both with providers,  
11 as well as community members and that sort of  
12 informed or adjusted sort of what we were doing. I  
13 didn't actually, I think, fully touch on your  
14 question around fraud prevention, so I mostly talked  
15 about like how are we getting information out as like  
16 education as like the primary utilization? And we  
17 pivoted many of our programs to support that. So,  
18 our know you're right programming, our NYC Care  
19 outreach programming, our we speak programming, all  
20 of this we sort of pivoted and trained everybody  
21 working on those on all of this and also shared what  
22 we were producing in different languages. And I know  
23 many community-based providers sort of took that and  
24 adapted it to better serve or to ensure it was  
25 surveying most effectively the folks that they were

2 working with. And, additionally, we worked with were  
3 sister agencies at DCWP to get information out around  
4 consumer protection. We did a lot of outreach  
5 engagement and work with them. We also worked with  
6 the DAs offices. So, the Staten Island DA.  
7 Immigrant task force sort of reached out to us to  
8 think about how can we support them in sort of anti-  
9 fraud messaging. Our team actually developed videos  
10 for them in different languages for them to also be  
11 able to utilize. So, lots of sort of different ways  
12 to address, I think, the question that you are  
13 raising.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah. And thank  
15 you for that. And I think part of that is really  
16 promoting groups when acknowledging the work. No  
17 doubt, the crisis moment caught us all off guard in a  
18 lot of ways and re-pivoting towards the messages that  
19 were coming down. We all live to that. I am now  
20 thinking about next wave and I'm not saying is there  
21 is going to be one. What I am saying is how do we  
22 prepare? And so, are any of these structures,  
23 infrastructure, relationships, and evergreen form?  
24 Like, are they going to still be there? Are they  
25 there forever now? Are they embedded into how MOIA

2 does what they do? Can you talk a little bit about  
3 that?

4 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah. Thank you  
5 for the question. It's a good one. So, yeah. I  
6 think I testified to this, in fact, I think, when you  
7 had me the first time around, but I really do think  
8 that, particularly, on this front, it has  
9 strengthened a lot of sort of how we do this work and  
10 what we need in place to most effectively do it. And  
11 so, we've been working-- a couple of things. One is  
12 to ensure that sort of an emergency translation  
13 contract is there and fully loaded, as needed, to  
14 assist if an emergency were to calm down. So, that  
15 is one key effort that we are ensuring remains in  
16 place and is something that we could leverage, as  
17 needed. Another is we developed and have been  
18 working with agency is around additional guidance  
19 around website accessibility and are working closely  
20 with Do It, to this effect. And we have not returned  
21 to the task force, but, certainly, the task force is  
22 a key sort of utilization that we would go back to  
23 again. It did serve the function that I think we  
24 needed it to around some of the best practices and  
25 other sort of guidance that we were able to

2 disseminate to agencies around specific translation  
3 needs. Additionally, we identified during this  
4 period to translation service providers that ended up  
5 providing free services, pro bono services, two hours  
6 sister agencies. So, sort of building out those  
7 relationships and ensuring that, as we need to, we  
8 can, you know, utilize or rely on them. We also  
9 built out like a little-- we have a bank, but not in  
10 this way, a bank of city employees who were able to  
11 sort of do their normal course of business who spoke  
12 different languages and could support with rapid  
13 translation that we haven't had to leverage at this  
14 moment, but certainly we can return to as we need to.  
15 So, those are some of the things, but, certainly, a  
16 lot more to both think through and also ensure, to  
17 your point, is, you know, putting in a better place  
18 if there was to be a second wave or any additional  
19 crisis.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Awesome. Thank you  
21 for that. And, again, thanks for really kind of  
22 offering the future work to kind of codify this and  
23 institutionalize this. Just to put a finer point on  
24 the emergency task force on language access, can we  
25 institutionalize that? Is that something that you

2 can do and really kind of make that official and  
3 promote that?

4 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: It is official. It  
5 is institutionalized at the Office of Emergency  
6 Management. Our team is always brought in. You  
7 know, there's a couple criteria that triggered,  
8 right, the sale of the impact and a particular area.  
9 The population that is impacted and then we are  
10 brought in to provide guidance. But what we are  
11 continuing to do is meet as a trifecta of agencies:  
12 OEM, our team, and DOH. Even though others are no  
13 longer joining up.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Got it. Thank you  
15 for that. And I will just give a quick anecdote and  
16 then we can talk about some of the other agency  
17 collaborations. When Sunset Park's spike went up in  
18 terms of positive rates, I went out to the city  
19 response and brought in testing and I took a test and  
20 I just saw a lot of opportunities for more support  
21 for translation. There is a lot of triage stuff, but  
22 we will talk about language access. A lot of the  
23 folks that were there helping were using Google  
24 translate on their phone to speak with people and it  
25 just felt like an opportunity there to really

2 understand that. He gave it to your team and I think  
3 there has been some changes, but I just kind of  
4 wanted to offer that as even as recent when that  
5 happened in Sunset Park, we were still witnessing  
6 these gaps.

7 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yep.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: So, I'm hoping that  
9 we can now really hone in on some of this stuff that  
10 is happening at DOH and that relationship. And I  
11 know this is hard and there's a lot of compassion in  
12 these questions that I am asking. But also a sense  
13 of how we can track those changes as we move forward  
14 because we are moving 13 different cylinders at the  
15 same time. So, I don't know if you wanted to respond  
16 to that, but it is just more--

17 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah. No. Just to  
18 thank you for raising it insert and lay we worked  
19 with the Health and Hospitals and the Test and  
20 Tracing team and, initially, actually, in the design  
21 of the program, both and looking at linguistic and  
22 cultural competency needs and to ensure that, as  
23 sites were set up, that was baked in, so not so happy  
24 to year that that's not the experience, but, when  
25 stuff gets elevated, it is helpful. It helps us

2 address it and the Sunset Park sort of recent peak,  
3 there were a couple other things that were addressed  
4 to us that we worked really closely with the test and  
5 trace program to ameliorate and receive positive  
6 feedback and it got better. So, I think, to your  
7 point, no no criticism. I want to hear it. I want  
8 to hear the challenges so that we can be responsive.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Awesome. Thank  
10 you, Commissioner. So, how has outreach and  
11 messaging from NYC Care shifted since the beginning  
12 of the pandemic and how are they continuing to enroll  
13 folks as you have kind of moved to telephonic and  
14 Internet-based communication?

15 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah. So, as you  
16 can imagine and no, so, in the first few months,  
17 really, the goal from Health and Hospitals was to  
18 ensure that sort of everybody was being directed  
19 centrally to receive support. And that doesn't mean  
20 that people weren't then being encouraged to enroll  
21 in NYC Care or that was an identified need. It just  
22 meant that the triaging had to happen in a different  
23 way to ensure is in those sort of peak of hospital  
24 infrastructure being weighed down, that it was being  
25 managed in the most efficient way to support. So,



2 what we did was worked with the providers on the  
3 ground that we found this as the key piece of how we  
4 support the NYC Care program in messaging and  
5 ensuring that they had information about other  
6 resources and helping as they pivoted from in person  
7 engagements to virtual or other engagements. Many,  
8 actually, I know-- you know, sometimes it was just  
9 one-on-one. Right? They would wait until a child  
10 went to bed and sit down on the phone with  
11 individuals to talk through resources available or  
12 how they could access testing or how support. And  
13 so, that is continued with the sort of notable  
14 exception, of course, that we advanced the rollout of  
15 NYC Care in Queens and Manhattan, very happily, by  
16 four months. We launched just a couple weeks ago at  
17 the beginning of September the full citywide effort  
18 and we not only continued, you know, the recognition  
19 of sort of the importance of the on the ground work--  
20 we not only did sort of a new sort of round of  
21 funding for our community providers in Queens and  
22 Manhattan, but have extended the sort of contracts  
23 that we have had with providers in the Bronx,  
24 Brooklyn, and Staten Island to continue this work.  
25 And, you know, now it is about 30 organizations that

2 speak different languages that are working in  
3 different communities and in different capacities.  
4 You know, in this period of time, I know, it reached  
5 about 15,000 folks and our goal is, through this  
6 effort, to ensure that the NYC Care program, now  
7 being available citywide, is really the front door  
8 for folks who are uninsured. You know, we know it's  
9 about half of our and documented population is  
10 uninsured and we want to make sure that people know  
11 that this is available to them and that they can  
12 enroll. I think, as nothing else, health pandemic  
13 speaks to why this is such a critical program.  
14 Right? And it is about having a primary care home.  
15 It's about having a safe space with your doctor that  
16 you know and that you trust in that who knows you.  
17 Right? Who could tell you, yes. You have a critical  
18 condition. You should not be doing these things or  
19 you need to go get tested and this is how you can do  
20 it. And having that 24 hour number that you can call  
21 and ensuring that you have, excuse me, that  
22 pharmaceutical access, right? It underscores that  
23 much more of what we inherently know, but is been a  
24 part of the heart and soul of what this program is.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah. Awesome.

3 This is great. And you said 15,000. Is that  
4 engagement or is that enrollment? 15,000 enrollment?

5 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Engagement.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Engagement. Do you  
7 have a sense of numbers on the actual enrollment?  
8 The full kind of gone through everything and are now  
9 enrolled.

10 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: They are going to  
11 kill me if I gave you the wrong number. I'm going to  
12 hold engines confirmed that the number I think is the  
13 right number.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Back to small  
15 businesses because this is something that, you know,  
16 we just passed a law yesterday on the 10 percent  
17 surcharge for business is. Many of our businesses  
18 are immigrant businesses. Tell me a little bit about  
19 your work with SBS, specifically on how about, you  
20 know, safety, reopening, guidelines. Those things  
21 keep changing. They will continue to change for a  
22 while. PPE. Tell us a little bit about how that  
23 works specifically.

24 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah. So, we have  
25 worked really closely with SBS on a number of things.

2 So, we focused efforts initially with them on getting  
3 information out around the payroll protection program  
4 and ensuring that people at small businesses had the  
5 information on how to apply and that it was broken  
6 down in language for folks who weren't English  
7 proficient. And did a number of engagements and  
8 webinars in different languages with SBS and really  
9 our team worked to support them and a lot of those  
10 efforts to ensure we were more effectively reaching  
11 folks. We also work to do and have continued into  
12 PPE distribution. So, we actually-- This is a  
13 broader, citywide effort, but I think we worked with  
14 some small businesses, with community-based  
15 organizations and others to identify PPE needs and  
16 then we worked to distribute those and continued to  
17 do so. So, that been a part of what we need to as  
18 well as, obviously, SBS being focused on the  
19 constituents that they have been working with to this  
20 effect. We have elevated issues and concerns that we  
21 have heard from the small business is to them to help  
22 address and continue to look with them about  
23 additional needs for communities. Doing business  
24 walks and others to understand kinds of people's  
25 experiences. I know this is such a difficult time

2 and there is a lot of uncertainty and the economic  
3 experience is so great, but they have been a really  
4 good partner and one in which we have ended up  
5 working a lot closely with at this time.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Moving  
7 over to the concept of fraud in general. I think we  
8 are seeing a lot more opportunities for fraud and  
9 scams targeting immigrants. Tell us a little bit  
10 about what you are working on that with DCWP or NYPD  
11 specifically or the DA offices. Anything new and  
12 targeted on that front?

13 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: coming, I think I  
14 spoke to this a little bit when you asked me the  
15 prior question and I don't know that I have too much  
16 to add. So, we haven't seen too much that is new to  
17 my understanding. I think we have, obviously, seeing  
18 a lot of sort of consumer needs, right, with DCWP  
19 sort of stepping in to enforce. We have seen a lot  
20 of employers not abiding by the rights of their  
21 workers, right? And either enforcing paid sick leave  
22 or pay for work. And so, we've worked closely with  
23 DCWP to both understand, monitor, and get information  
24 out about these things. We have worked with DCWP and  
25 the DAs to give sort of specific examples of fraud

2 that we have heard of that of been elevated to us and  
3 our team and insured that we have incorporated in our  
4 fact sheets, sort of our frequently asked questions,  
5 a Q&A for individuals. And I don't know, Jean, if  
6 you want to add anything. This is really something  
7 that you have also helped to lead.

8           JEAN BAE: Thank you. Just one thing to  
9 add is that one of the things that, you know, we have  
10 discussed a lot with the DAs office as well as DCWP  
11 is that people by end of fraud because they really  
12 need resources and, you know, they don't know where  
13 to get them. And so, one of the things that we  
14 really tried to to is a lot of proactive outreach.  
15 So, whether it is the DAs office with the immigrants  
16 CBO partners that they have or with the DCWP . So,  
17 just making sure that we had a lot of-- that's why a  
18 lot of the videos that we created were actually  
19 focused on city resources that are actually, you  
20 know, available to everyone to make sure that  
21 everyone knew that there are, you know, legitimate  
22 resources where they can get information and services  
23 that they need. So, that was some of the work that  
24 we have done relating to the virtual town halls and  
25 video, you know, distribution to the people.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Got it. Thank you.  
3 And I know we had already talked about it. I guess I  
4 was just looking-- there might not be anything  
5 specifically, so we can move on. But really looking  
6 at things like trends. Any issues that are in  
7 progress right now, investigation and-- not to talk  
8 about the investigation, but that NYPD is working and  
9 activating teams inside of the DA offices and  
10 immigration offices. So, if there is nothing  
11 specific, then that is fine. But, that's what I was  
12 trying to see if we can understand.

13 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: E engage early and  
14 often with, certainly, the DA offices, as we do sort  
15 of regularly, as well as our providers and others.  
16 And I don't think beyond the sort of number one  
17 things that we were hearing which really have to do  
18 with enforcement of things like paid sick leave and  
19 peoples sort of wage and hour rates and things like  
20 that we saw. You know, and then, generally like  
21 price increases or gouging DCWP was enforcing in  
22 businesses. I don't think that we saw trends to  
23 speak to or sort of, you know, focus on. We did  
24 focus, as I know you know, and spoke to in your  
25 opening remarks on just the rise in hate crimes

2 against particularly our Asian American communities  
3 across the city and we worked really closely for  
4 several months with both NYPD and the Mayor's Office  
5 to Prevent Hate Crimes, as well as our Humans Rights  
6 Commission as sort of a cohort of agencies that met  
7 regularly and developed sort of responses to what we  
8 were seeing and different ways of addressing  
9 everything from our own communications and  
10 information dissemination and town halls to education  
11 and curricula and programming to being responsive to  
12 the complaints that people were receiving and  
13 investigations and sort of tracking them more  
14 closely. So, that was one area where, certainly, we  
15 were working closely with NYPD on being responsive.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay. And I will  
17 just leave you with this. No need for response,  
18 though he would love your support. We know that  
19 there are workers that are getting for load and  
20 pushed out because of the economy, but done so,  
21 potentially, illegally. And many of these are  
22 immigrant workers. And so, some of the just came out  
23 in a hearing with Industry City. Some workers at  
24 Industry City. [Inaudible 01:38:10] brief you on  
25 that and seeing Annie's support that you can offer us



2 as we move to protect their rights and bring in all  
3 the offices to ensure that a proper investigation  
4 happens.

5 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah. Please.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

7 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Just to circle  
8 back, I should have just said it. 30,000 enrollees  
9 in NYC Care so far.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Right on. That's a  
11 beautiful number.

12 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: We are trying to  
14 get to 40 ASAP, right? Is that the--

15 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: ASAP.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Let's talk a little  
17 bit about food services. A lot of stuff kind of both  
18 at the mutual aid side with Neighbors Helping company  
19 burgers, but also with the city. What role did MOIA  
20 play and getting food out to people and creating the  
21 meal of and really impacting immigrant communities  
22 that can access that?

23 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah. Thank you.

24 This has been, as I said, in terms of the sort of  
25 demand around questions or needs that we have seen,

2 food has hovered in sort of 1 to 3, depending on the  
3 individual that we are speaking to or the community.  
4 So, huge, huge, huge need and just a tremendous area  
5 of work that happened and continues to have been.  
6 So, you know, we, you know, worked closely-- and the  
7 Mayor has said this continuously to ensure that, and  
8 anything that the city was listing up, as it related  
9 to food distribution, and was available to all,  
10 regardless of immigration status and that there  
11 weren't sort of unnecessary barriers to people being  
12 able to access it because of fear of questions that  
13 might be asked or information that might be  
14 collected. So, we worked really, really closely with  
15 many, many different actors across the Administration  
16 on some of these pieces and sort of centered, of  
17 course, three primary efforts. One around increasing  
18 and in partnership with the Council funding the food  
19 pantries across the city, two around establishing the  
20 meal hubs with about 400 locations across the city.  
21 And, lastly, listing up the food delivery service  
22 beyond the elderly, but really, for anybody who felt  
23 they needed it at the moment, either for fear of  
24 contraction or inability to leave your home or many,  
25 many other reasons, right? And in all levels of

2 that, sword of engagement and programming, we have  
3 been involved in different ways. So, I spoke sort of  
4 on the sort of policy-setting around what we were  
5 doing to be inclusive, but, beyond that, also looking  
6 at how to ensure that the information was being  
7 disseminated and, you know, as much of a linguistic  
8 and culturally competent way as possible. We worked  
9 to ensure that at our meal hubs locations, our  
10 immigrant resource guides were available for people  
11 to pick up in different languages attuned to the  
12 needs of that community. We worked to ensure that,  
13 as the Get Food program was being rolled out, that a  
14 trusted enrollers program was established,  
15 recognizing that the feedback we received and  
16 certainly no from our work is that, you know, while  
17 an immigrant New Yorker might feel comfortable  
18 walking to a community based provider that they work  
19 with, they might not so much feel comfortable going  
20 online and registering for that program. So, the  
21 trusted and rollers, we established at least a  
22 network of 10 directly from us and the additional  
23 others that could enroll people directly and then our  
24 team became trusted enrollers. So, our outreach team  
25 and others, to be able to enroll individual, as well

2 themselves. So, those are some of the ways in which  
3 we've worked on. The food efforts, we also, through  
4 our emergency relief programming, required to the  
5 information about the food delivery services and meal  
6 of be given to every New Yorker that inquired about  
7 the emergency relief efforts and, you know, we  
8 received a lot of feedback around sort of how to make  
9 the program even more and tuned to the needs of  
10 communities and have been working closely with the  
11 food policy team and the team over at sanitation and  
12 looking at sort of the next phase of this.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Well, let's talk  
14 about this. I think this is an opportunity to  
15 elevate something that came to my office a lot with  
16 some of the stuff that we were working on at the  
17 mutual aid work, which was pretty robust in Sunset  
18 Park, but across the city with dealing with immigrant  
19 communities with culturally specific food. Did that  
20 come up and how did MOIA really helped to change  
21 those things? Did you feel like the city is there in  
22 terms of giving immigrant communities culturally  
23 specific food?

24 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah. It's one of  
25 the number one things that came up to us and it is

2 something that we have been working with that, you  
3 know, I can't speak directly for all of the decision-  
4 making for my colleagues, but certainly empathize  
5 with those sort of scale and intentionality of an  
6 emergency response at the moment as opposed to sort  
7 of what it is ideal for communities. And we are  
8 really at the place with stepping away from sort of  
9 the emergency moment to step back and say, how can we  
10 adjust this to be more responsive to things like  
11 cultural competence. And what we've been hearing  
12 from communities and, I think, we have a shared  
13 interest across the administration, I'm happy to say.  
14 We have been in regular conversations on this front,  
15 so, any additional thoughts that people are hearing  
16 or feedback, we would love to hear them.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Awesome. And maybe  
18 that will come up in the panels moving forward. So,  
19 I hope people who are here to testify soon can bring  
20 that up is that wasn't already on your testimony.  
21 Let's talk about-- And as we transition to HRA, HRA  
22 has made benefits and, a lot of those benefits,  
23 people, because of public charge-- and we saw that  
24 happening before COVID-- have opted out. But before  
25 we get to the HRA piece, I just want to say that I

2 think, as we look at-- use the word Evergreen, but,  
3 institutionalizing this work, COVID may disappear,  
4 but the food need-- And I think that's what we are  
5 really understanding. And so, I just [inaudible  
6 01:44:50] a commitment from you. And I know there is  
7 a lot more commitment that needs to happen across the  
8 board, but that the food will continue to thrive.  
9 That we get better at distribution, language access,  
10 all those pieces. Culturally competent food. But  
11 that you also understand that food need will not go  
12 down, even if COVID is solved.

13 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: For sure. I think  
14 that this is-- you know, I'm not the first to say  
15 it. I think the Mayor has actually said this.  
16 Right? This is a commitment to ensure that we are  
17 being responsive on food. That no New Yorker feels  
18 they have to go hungry. And I think, really, the  
19 focus of this moment is the pivoting to be responsive  
20 to feedback we have received and to think about what  
21 the next phase looks like to better serve our  
22 communities. And, you know, I am, again, happy to  
23 say that these conversations have already begun, have  
24 been taking place for a while and we look forward to  
25 continuing them.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Awesome. I'll  
3 follow up with your team about a church in Sunset  
4 Park that is seeing up to 100 cases and they don't  
5 have the capacity for food right now with private  
6 donations. And so, that is just an example of food  
7 need going on even when COVID rates are down.

8 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: So, let's just go  
10 back to HRA and give us a little sense about that.  
11 Public charge is made a big impact. COVID, probably,  
12 too. The elections. Know about what HRA is doing in  
13 partnership with you.

14 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Sure. So, HRA does  
15 a lot, so I certainly won't pretend to speak to all  
16 of it, but we focused, as I said, early on-- early  
17 and often both around public charge and messaging on  
18 that front and, as I said, with the Department of  
19 Health, we launched the support not fear campaign  
20 that was informed certainly by the experiences of  
21 other agencies like HRA and community members that we  
22 were speaking to. We also conducted a focus group,  
23 honestly, in the midst of the crisis just to make  
24 sure we got it right. And we were reaching people in  
25 the right way. So, we had a huge focus on TV and

2 radio because was really how people were receiving a  
3 lot of their information. Additionally, we worked on  
4 the burial assistance program with HRA, right? Not  
5 just addressing the inclusion or lack of inclusion of  
6 immigrant New Yorkers who were undocumented, but also  
7 being responsive to the fact that, and an economic  
8 devastation, the reimbursement was pretty low. So,  
9 raising the whole cost for all New Yorkers of the  
10 reimbursement. And also making that retroactive.  
11 So, was available to the New Yorkers back to March.  
12 That was a huge effort and one that we continue to  
13 work with them on and we have been-- they were a  
14 part of, initially, the language access task force,  
15 so, brought in as one of the agencies that was  
16 really, you know, giving critical services, making  
17 sure that those services were available in many  
18 different languages and in the myriad of ways for  
19 limited English proficient New Yorkers. Those are  
20 some of the ways we worked closely with them. Also  
21 around-- Sorry. One other thing I didn't mention  
22 was the shifting of legal services. Right? Just  
23 staying in close coordination around the sort of  
24 spectrum of programming that the city has funded to



2 ensure that we were being responsive to providers and  
3 supporting sort of is needed.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: and [inaudible  
5 01:48:34] part of the emergency task force for  
6 language access, as well? Or just HRA?

7 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: I'm sorry. Can you  
8 rephrase the question? You cut out.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: The OCME component,  
10 were they part of the emergency task force for  
11 language access or was it--

12 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: just HRA? Oh. So  
14 they were a part of it, as well.

15 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yes.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Awesome. And I  
17 remember our teams talking a lot during that time and  
18 really just spending time just to understand it, so  
19 thank you for that work.

20 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Sure. There's one  
21 other thing I didn't mention which is around tenant  
22 protections. So, we have worked closely with HRA on  
23 this front, as well, both in terms of legal support,  
24 but also which, thankfully, at least, until October  
25 1, but we are not seeing the evictions related to

2 COVID economic loss. Hopefully even further than  
3 that. But, additionally, we have been working with  
4 their home base program to ensure that that program  
5 is situated and able to assist New Yorkers as needed  
6 at this moment. Rent and sort of housing in general.  
7 And, again, sort of as I said, again, and that  
8 trifecta of the top three things that we've been  
9 hearing about and concerns. And so, that is an area  
10 where we have been working with HRA, as well.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Well, on that, we  
12 just need to cancel rent. You know, that's going to  
13 solve everything. And I know that, I'm sure, you're  
14 working on that, as well. Calling the Governor,  
15 right? But back to OCME because we spent some time  
16 and there was a lot of, connected to food, even,  
17 culturally responsive-- not just on the language  
18 side, but really understanding each culture burial  
19 traditions were really important here. And,  
20 especially, as immigrants were facing the kind of  
21 highest impact, can you just talk a little bit about  
22 that and put just a finer point on how you have  
23 really accelerated that understanding and changed the  
24 way that OCME is interacting with New Yorkers?

2                   COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Sure. So, I can  
3 say a couple of things and then I don't know, Jean,  
4 if you have more to add. This is also an area I  
5 think you lead a lot on. So, I will say first we  
6 worked with them and with HRA on the development of  
7 the burial assistance application. We his second  
8 delay worked to ensure that our team actually helped  
9 them sort of revamped their website to make it more  
10 accessible for people who spoke the top 10 languages  
11 at that time and for information to be easy to sort  
12 of navigate in the top 10 languages and really  
13 focused with them on that. But in terms of what they  
14 were developing, but also how it was user-friendly to  
15 access. You know, we worked closely with the team,  
16 as well, and just there sort of as they were  
17 developing guidance and information to incorporate  
18 that into our resource guide and also, as we were  
19 getting questions, which were many-- and I know your  
20 office was also getting many questions-- including  
21 that in our frequently asked questions and sharing  
22 that with them. So, we sort of work to try to ensure  
23 that the information was clear and accessible for  
24 immigrant New Yorkers. To your point, in addition to  
25 sort of them-- and this is just the complicating

2 factor of all of the actors, right? A lot of the  
3 things, particularly went back to console outside.  
4 And so, that is a little bit separated and our team  
5 work directly with consulates for issues or cases  
6 that were brought to our attention. They actually  
7 briefed consulates during this pandemic a couple of  
8 times, but also worked on individual cases around  
9 burials as they each had their own sort of  
10 requirements and guidance when a loved one was lost  
11 here, but a family wanted to send the body back home  
12 for a proper burial.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Got it. Thank you.  
14 And I hope that has really changed not just in a  
15 crisis moment, but really changed the process.  
16 Information sharing and just attention to tradition  
17 as it changes immigrant community and immigrant  
18 community.

19 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Jean, today want to  
20 add anything?

21 JEAN BAE: Yes. Actually, so exactly to  
22 your point. So, one of the things that we have  
23 worked on, in addition to working on our FAQ to  
24 address the questions, for instance, was when HRA,  
25 you know, burial assistance grant and developing

2 FAQs, a lot of the questions that we were trying to  
3 address was, you know, is cremation covered or, you  
4 know, if I tried to repatriate the body to another  
5 country, would that be covered under the grant, etc.  
6 so, sort of asking these questions as we designed  
7 programs that are there to support people who are  
8 dealing with the deaths of their loved ones. Or like  
9 if they have to locate the body at H&H or OCME, you  
10 know, the process, etc. So, you know, cultural  
11 sensitivity and sort of language access are  
12 definitely the things that we, you know, care a lot  
13 about and something that we are sensitive to and have  
14 been working with other agencies with.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. And  
16 that reminds me, actually, both to Jean and  
17 Commissioner. Our recent bill that we had proposed  
18 to create a separate hotline for burial really do  
19 allow for just expertise to be connected directly to  
20 the people and really building out language access  
21 there. Can you comment on that? I know that is not  
22 on this hearing, so I'm putting you on the spot for  
23 something that we want to have in full later, but is  
24 there anything that you can kind of comment on it now

2 as we work with you to kind of get ready for a full  
3 hearing on that?

4 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: So, I can't comment  
5 on the bill. I guess I can say what we've done--  
6 what HRA has done, maybe, to similar issues that  
7 you're trying to address. So, we have, through the  
8 work that we've done with them to sort of shore up  
9 the burial assistance program and making it more  
10 accessible, done a number of things. One is there is  
11 a phone line that people can call and receive one-on-  
12 one assistance. We've made sure-- Sorry?

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Is that through  
14 MOIA or--

15 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: HRA.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: HRA. Okay.

17 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: For the burial  
18 assistance efforts. So, they are really the experts,  
19 right? So, this staff that we have staffing that,  
20 including, as I said, at this moment, ID NYC staff  
21 that are bringing in additional linguistic capacity  
22 to that work. They are able to support people in  
23 filling out their application, and connecting with  
24 the funeral homes and making sure that they have all  
25 the pieces that they need to get the reimbursement.

2 They have made it easier to submit the application by  
3 email, via fax, drop it off if they need to. They  
4 are really sort of serving as case managers for  
5 individuals. If people can't access the application,  
6 they will mail it to them. Right? So, they have  
7 really done a lot to make that, you know, more  
8 responsive to the needs of New Yorkers who are going  
9 through the process. A lot of the challenges are  
10 many, right? Because you are dealing with consulate,  
11 funeral home. Right? Identification of where the  
12 body is. All of the things. So, they are working,  
13 honestly, I was like caseworkers to assist individual  
14 applicants to get them through to the finish line.  
15 So, a lot of effort has been done. I don't know all  
16 the things that you are seeking to address, but a lot  
17 of the effort has been done to make that more  
18 accessible, but also so that the city team is doing  
19 that one-on-one support for each individual applying  
20 for the process and to make that application process  
21 as easy as we can.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Awesome. We don't  
23 have to belabor that now, but I do want to talk to  
24 you a little bit about the bill. I think it  
25 comprehensively addresses some of those pieces. But,

2 also, there were a lot of things that are changing  
3 every day and so, on just the burial part, there is  
4 an opportunity here to create a hotline where folks  
5 can really understand it and people can call and not  
6 flood 311. And I know you are saying that HRA has  
7 aligned. So, we are really interested in seeing how  
8 that works and-- But we will table that for now.  
9 Thank you for that update.

10 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Sure.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: That work. I mean,  
12 that is all about dignity. Dignity even in death.  
13 And many of them were immigrant communities that were  
14 impacted. So, thank you for that work. I want to  
15 move over to schools. And I think was that even just  
16 today that the Mayor announced a change in school  
17 openings? I am not happy with any of that right now,  
18 but how is MOIA engaged to the Department of  
19 Education on school reopening's?

20 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: So, I will focus on  
21 a few things. So, one is to say that we have been  
22 working hand-in-hand with DOE throughout the pandemic  
23 in the spraying, but also now at ensuring that  
24 families have connections to remote learning devices.  
25 You know, what we saw was a lot of our communities,



2 right, didn't have necessarily the access that they  
3 needed. And so, a concerted effort on our part has  
4 been really to get information out about how people  
5 can access that information. Additionally, as  
6 updates are coming out, we are working with our team  
7 to disseminate them and kinds of all of the ways that  
8 we have been working to share information to include  
9 updates to work individually with families. We have  
10 done so not just with our team, but through sharing  
11 of information and regular briefings with our Know  
12 Your Rights providers, with others so that this  
13 information is more universally in the hands of folks  
14 that are working directly with communities. We, as I  
15 said, have been working closely with DOE on the meal  
16 hubs. That's something that we'll continue to do  
17 and just ensuring food access, as schools reopen,  
18 remains a priority. And the work that we do moving  
19 forward. And there was one more thing that I wanted  
20 to add and I'm drawing a blank around it. You know,  
21 I would say in terms of specifics or issues that are  
22 raised with us, of course, we communicate those with  
23 DOE for their awareness and consideration around  
24 challenges that either their families or communities  
25 may be experiencing.

2                   JEAN BAE:     And just to add-- Sorry.

3 Just to add one thing to that. So, we fully  
4 understand that a lot of immigrant families are  
5 making tough decisions about what to do relating to  
6 schools. So as there have been, you know, relating  
7 to reopening, they're have been, you know, parent  
8 sessions and meetings with the parent-teacher  
9 coordinators. We have been part of some of those,  
10 you know, outreach efforts and actually making sure  
11 that they are aware of the city resources that they  
12 can utilize to the extent, you know, they need help.  
13 And so, we definitely made sure that they are aware  
14 of the MOIA programs and MOIA immigrant resources, as  
15 well as other city programs that would be helpful for  
16 them during this time.

17                   CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Again, thank you  
18 for that. Some of that has happened in Sunset Park  
19 in District 13 and so I want to say thank you for  
20 that work. I am kind of curious about whether or not  
21 you know how many immigrant or families with  
22 immigrant kids-- immigrant children we have. Maybe  
23 specifically LEP students and what sense of  
24 understanding do we have in terms of the population

2 itself that may need MOIA assistance or MOIA  
3 attention or MOIA support.

4 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: So, I don't have  
5 specific numbers in front of me today to be able to  
6 sort of share. I think, in general, we work very  
7 closely with DOE on a number of efforts throughout  
8 the year, right, including provision of legal  
9 services at schools, including Know Your Rights  
10 programming within schools, including dissemination  
11 of information in partnership with the Council,  
12 right, to families around immigrant rights.  
13 Including ID NYC enrollment, right? We do a lot, a  
14 lot, a lot with DOE and, in general, engage a  
15 tremendous amount and are focused very often on  
16 targeting school districts where we know that  
17 foreign-born sort of families or populations are the  
18 highest. We work very closely with District 79. We  
19 work very, very closely with the International  
20 Schools network. A lot of that work has continued.  
21 I think this sort of breadth of the challenge that  
22 DOE is tackling and that you are raising here is Sir  
23 and Lee not lost on us, but I think the specifics we  
24 have tried to to and certainly have done is plug  
25 community-based providers that we know that are

2 working on these issues and have raised with us the  
3 kind of experiences of their members on the ground  
4 into very specific-- some of the consulates, for  
5 example. We work to ensure the International Schools  
6 network were a part of those when the Mayor announced  
7 them. We work to ensure that groups like Make the  
8 Road were a part of some of those conversations  
9 around reopening so that the challenges that we were  
10 hearing could be raised effectively.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And, I guess, for  
12 me, I'm thinking a little bit about the work-- just  
13 to understand the nature of the number of people. I  
14 guess I'm trying to get a sense of how many people  
15 are in need of these services. So, if you can give  
16 us a sense of how many. Because something about  
17 technological language access support and if you  
18 really have an understanding of how many people are  
19 we talking about. Some of the work that you laid out  
20 on really a lot of the conversations that we just had  
21 were supporting systems like CBO's and others to  
22 support their membership, but I'm just trying to get  
23 a sense from you all about if you have a sense of the  
24 actual need.

2                   COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah. I mean, what  
3 I was pointing to was we work regularly with DOE on a  
4 number of these issues. I just don't have the  
5 number-- cannot recalling nor do I have sort of the  
6 immediate sort of numbers. Obviously, it's a school  
7 district of about 1.1 million students. There is a  
8 large foreign-born population. My hazing, foggy  
9 memory wants me to say that maybe it's about 60  
10 percent. I don't know if that is accurate, so I  
11 don't want to give you wrong numbers.

12                   CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah. It would  
13 just be good to have a sense and--

14                   COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Sure.

15                   CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And because what  
16 we're trying to do-- and this is the work in the  
17 committee-- we're trying to really see a trend in  
18 the nature of the population that is in need of  
19 service.

20                   COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah.

21                   CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: In all the things  
22 that we talked about. And we're finding that,  
23 whether it's small businesses, etc., a majority of  
24 these families and folks that we service are  
25 immigrants. And that's the point and really--

2 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Totally. Yep.

3 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: getting ready for  
4 the budget, getting ready for all these things that  
5 you're going to-- I'm hoping that we work together  
6 to really understand what are the resources that are  
7 necessary that we're all finding holes and gaps to  
8 fill. And that's all about resources. And just  
9 today that the Mayor changed or made some adjustments  
10 to opening, I'm assuming that now 60 percent of the  
11 folks are going to need a different kind of touch of  
12 information and a different language, technical  
13 issues, and so how is MOIA, just today, prepared to  
14 communicate that message and how are you really  
15 understanding the efficiency and the effective nature  
16 of the communication?

17 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah. I mean, so I  
18 won't repeat sort of the myriad ways in which we sort  
19 of take the-- this is a good example, right? This  
20 is a critical update that has to be received by, you  
21 know, millions of New Yorkers across our city and it  
22 has to be done in a way that's both speedy but also  
23 effective. And so, it is exactly. This is an  
24 example of where our team will sort of take it plug  
25 it into all of the way in which we are disseminating

2 information, including one of which we haven't really  
3 touched on, but has been hugely important and we've  
4 actually-- this is probably one of the areas where  
5 we've focused the most with schools on is ensuring,  
6 kind of, two things. One, we're reaching community  
7 and ethnic media with updates. So, we've done  
8 roundtables with the Chancellor and with others. We  
9 have disseminated regular briefings to community and  
10 ethnic media on schools and school adjustments,  
11 amongst other things. We have additionally, in  
12 partnership with the Department of Health, taken out  
13 really detailed sort of plans around sort of key  
14 issues, including food, health, and education being  
15 another one. So, those are some of the ways I didn't  
16 touch on that have been kind of key ways of  
17 communicating this information that we have worked  
18 with the DOE on, as well as other partners. And so,  
19 this is exactly, you know, a shift in which we will  
20 kind of look at all of those different efforts. We  
21 have a sense, certainly, of what is working. I think  
22 to answer your question on efficacy, right? We are  
23 trying to see and understand this in different ways.  
24 Some of it is immediate and you can kind of see the  
25 response. A good example of that is our immigration

2 legal help line. You know, as soon as we sort of  
3 pushed out information about it remaining operable,  
4 we saw a spike of about 15 percent in utilization it  
5 right? So, others are harder. Right? You know, we  
6 are relying a lot on continued feedback loop. We are  
7 relying on continued engagement, working closely with  
8 our sister agencies to see what their incoming is and  
9 understanding as things are having the right impact.  
10 I'm sorry. I think you are on mute.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay. Got it.

12 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: In the realm of  
14 education, we're going to see these moments. I know  
15 your team is going to be taxed in the whole thing is  
16 going to be taxed, but how we inch towards better  
17 communication as our goal as we move forward. So,  
18 thank you for that. I appreciate that. Let's move  
19 over to the last set of questions. And these are  
20 really around something that the Mayors fund  
21 partnered up with you on relief for undocumented New  
22 Yorkers. In my resolution really kind of speaks to a  
23 statewide solution. But, on April 16th, even before  
24 where we are now, the Mayor announced the partnership  
25 with Open Society Foundation. 20 million dollars



2 that you spoke of brought relief. When was the money  
3 in the hands of eligible applicants?

4 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: I mean, I don't  
5 have the exact sort of initial date. I would say the  
6 partnership was announced in April. I think the  
7 Mayor's fund, you know, received the money and  
8 [inaudible 02:09:14] to lift up the program a few  
9 weeks, maybe, thereafter. When kind of the first  
10 dollars made their way into the hands of community  
11 members, I want to say late May was probably--  
12 middle May, late May was probably the first. I'm not  
13 sure. I'd want to get back to you with sort of more  
14 accuracy on that. The bulk of which was distributed  
15 in those sort of first couple of months. So May,  
16 June, July and we have been working with partners to  
17 complete the distribution of the funds which should  
18 be by the end of this month. And we saw early on and  
19 often and were in regular communication with  
20 partners-- and I spoke a little bit about this in  
21 terms of the demand of the need and we worked closely  
22 with elected officers around this, right? The scale  
23 of the need has just been so tremendous that kind of  
24 wait lists existed sort of as early as May, right?  
25 And June. And so providers have really been making

2 their way through their lists in order to distribute  
3 sort of mechanically the funds and to get them out  
4 the door. Yeah. In terms of timeline, I don't have  
5 the exact sort of date as to sort of when money was  
6 in the first recipients' hands, but roughly what I  
7 gave you is accurate.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Got it. Okay. So,  
9 money is still being distributed even now with the  
10 goal of fully distributing the 20 million by the end  
11 of this month.

12 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yes.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay. And when you  
14 said providers, are you talking about the CBO's that  
15 you partnered up with on the ground in communities?

16 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yes.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And were those  
18 providers given equal distribution of funding across  
19 the board?

20 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: No. So, we have a  
21 network of about 30 direct providers that we  
22 contracted with and about 20 additional providers who  
23 served as referral partners for the program and it  
24 sort of varied. A lot of it was based on the  
25 capacity expressed to us by the providers themselves.

2 A lot of it was based by our own analyses of the  
3 data. So understanding, you know, I started in  
4 speaking to the undocumented worker population of  
5 being about 366,000 New Yorkers. So, our team really  
6 looking at that and kind of understanding kind of  
7 both industries, but also what communities workers  
8 were in and trying to be intentional in dissemination  
9 to be responsive with what we had, right? With  
10 working with data, working with community providers,  
11 working with capacities. Everybody speaks to lots of  
12 learnings, certainly, for many things. But, you  
13 know, the urgency in which money needed to get out  
14 the door, infrastructure really didn't exist to reach  
15 people in that sort of expansive of a way. So we had  
16 to also develop in a couple of weeks, right, and an  
17 infrastructure for some of the smaller providers in  
18 particular to leverage to get the money out the door,  
19 to do so in a way where we center privacy and  
20 confidentiality. Those things take a little bit  
21 longer, right, in really working out those details  
22 and being responsive to what we're hearing the needs  
23 were on the ground. So, you know, to not take sort  
24 of the feedback around the timelines and things that,  
25 but I do think a lot of this has to do with, you

2 know, how are we sort of lifting something up that's  
3 meeting the needs, that's responsive, and that allows  
4 for providers to also be a part of it, but  
5 recognizing that people are at different capacity  
6 levels and can serve different numbers of folks in a  
7 shorter period of time.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: How much money do  
9 you have left from the fund?

10 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: How much do we have  
11 left?

12 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes.

13 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Not much. It's a  
14 handful of providers. I don't know the exact number.  
15 Maybe five or so who are completing the sort of final  
16 phase of distribution. We also-- Yeah. So, we're  
17 working closely with them to kind of wrap or complete  
18 their distribution. Some of the groups got a later  
19 start. Some of the groups had a harder time sort of  
20 getting through their lists. So, for various  
21 reasons, certainly, our intention wasn't to take  
22 money away from communities, but the kind of work  
23 with the providers to give them more time to release  
24 the funds. Our initial goal was to try to do so  
25 within a two-month period, but we recognized that

2 wasn't necessarily feasible for folks that didn't  
3 have that infrastructure.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Got it. I want to  
5 get into that infrastructure really the first  
6 question is really the decision-making matrix or  
7 criterion that you followed for distributing funds to  
8 undocumented New Yorkers. Can you talk a little bit  
9 about that to the committee about how you made that  
10 decision in the first place? We talked about how it  
11 got distributed to the CBO's, but how did you make  
12 the decisions on who got money?

13 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah. Well, we  
14 worked closely with the Open Society Foundation. I  
15 think, recognizing early and often as many did, what  
16 it would mean both because of public charge, but also  
17 all of the restrictions that the safety net have on  
18 access to resources for undocumented families. So,  
19 we very quickly sort of worked to understand what  
20 impact could look like and who might be left out of  
21 sort of key resources. And as soon as the stimulus  
22 was announced, the CARES Act and it was clear what  
23 the exclusion was going to be for undocumented  
24 individuals and mix status households, we really  
25 centered on that. Right? We sort of centered

2 emergency relief asks for individuals who would be  
3 left out of that stimulus as the sort of primary  
4 eligibility criteria to look for to ascertain  
5 somebody's eligibility for this grant. So, if you  
6 are eligible for the, if you were a low income  
7 family, etc., and you had experienced some loss,  
8 right, you could express to us you lost employment,  
9 you lost some income, then you would be eligible for  
10 this. And we didn't make this arduous at all. The  
11 goal, of course, was to make it as easy as possible  
12 for folks who were suffering at this time to engage  
13 with trusted providers and to express this need and  
14 access the resource.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And you mentioned  
16 capacity. Some of these organizations had capacity  
17 at varying ways and abilities to get this money out.  
18 War organizations compensated for their work from the  
19 city in a different way in a different funding stream  
20 separate and apart from the funding that we are  
21 going-- that were going directly to families?

22 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah. So, the  
23 Mayor's fund, and contracting with the providers, did  
24 provide an administrative amount or percentage,  
25 depending on the grants and, in most cases, with the

2 organization expressed to us was needed.

3 Additionally, always supported, you know, other admin  
4 aspects of the program, including mailing and things  
5 like that.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And are you getting  
7 good feedback from that? I know are going to hear  
8 from some of the organizations in the next panel, but  
9 were you getting positive feedback about that  
10 support? Or potential changes about the capacity?

11 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Sure. So, I mean,  
12 I can't speak for every provider. I will say that  
13 our team is conducting an evaluation of the program  
14 itself to ensure that we, in a more systematic way,  
15 have the feedback and can inform future efforts like  
16 this in terms of, you know, was the admin cost  
17 efficient? Did it address all of the needs that you  
18 had as an organization? If so or if not, why? We  
19 have already gotten some of that. It was a range of  
20 admin costs, again, based in part on the what was  
21 initially expressed by the grantees and I think some  
22 of that has informed even continued conversations  
23 we've had with others cities, with other  
24 philanthropic partners about them thinking about  
25 setting up systems like it is and what is necessary

2 to support the capacity of organizations at this time  
3 to do so.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Is that something  
5 you can share with us after you have completed?

6 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Sure. Yeah.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. And,  
8 again, I think that these are things that we want to  
9 anticipate both the state fixing their issue with  
10 really, but also making sure that you have what you  
11 need and our organizations have what they need is, in  
12 fact, they were met with more burden to administer  
13 this. Because the city didn't administer this. They  
14 were nonprofits that were dealing with so many  
15 things. And I think we are going to hear that in  
16 some of the panels as we get to them. Can you talk a  
17 little bit about data privacy? I mean, this is  
18 something that you and I talk about a lot in ensuring  
19 our data is private. What do you ensure in the  
20 process or how did the process ensure that throughout  
21 this program?

22 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah. I just want  
23 to give a little bit of credit where credit is due.  
24 So, my team got no money to do this work and my team  
25 worked until midnight, I think, many, many, many



2 nights to continue to operate this program. So, I  
3 just want to give credit where credit is due, both  
4 recognizing what the experience of providers that  
5 were on the ground, but also that it is sort of  
6 program manage this program was not easy, to lift it  
7 up in a short period of time was not easy. And we  
8 made it work, but that meant people worked a lot of  
9 hours. So, just want to acknowledge that.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you for doing  
11 that.

12 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: I think them for  
14 doing that work.

15 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: So, in terms of  
16 your question on privacy, yeah. So, again, this was  
17 part of, you know, in looking at a number saying.  
18 One is sort of without a federal or state  
19 infrastructure where people are already receiving the  
20 benefit, right, and you can sort of channel a benefit  
21 through an existing meeting in, EBT is a really good  
22 example, right? Or pandemic EBT, even, where there  
23 is like a roster of people who are able to receive  
24 that benefit because they have school-age children  
25 who are registered in the schools have that

2 information, that looked very different than what we  
3 were trying to do, which was, literally, to reach a  
4 population where we had done everything that we can  
5 not to create lists, right?

6 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah.

7 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: happened so, that  
8 was a pivot or, you know, needing to do so in a new  
9 way. But also to be responsive to the concerns that  
10 folks might have in accessing the resources. So,  
11 obviously, starting with the community-based  
12 providers that sort of trusted places or locations  
13 where people could receive the benefit was hugely  
14 important. Additionally, we did a couple of things.  
15 One is through our contracting with the providers  
16 themselves. There is very strict restrictions on  
17 what information can be collected and how it can be  
18 stored and how it can be accessed and what  
19 requirements are to be had if, in fact, there is any  
20 requests for information related to the program by  
21 way of notice. We worked really closely with the  
22 financial partner that we ended up contracting with  
23 through the Mayor's Fund to not only ensure that they  
24 weren't collecting any personal information. So, no  
25 names and information of the individuals receiving

2 the benefit, but that all that they had was aggregate  
3 information, right? And that, in turn, was all we  
4 had as the city. So, we don't have any personal  
5 information, either. There are no names, no  
6 addresses, etc. We further attached a writer or  
7 additionally required sort of provisions around sort  
8 of privacy and confidentiality that we worked really  
9 closely with our chief privacy officer, as well as  
10 the law department to develop on the contract and we,  
11 lastly, had them in just one element of the program  
12 that makes the card to, in some ways, easier to use  
13 online. where you would have to register it, we  
14 asked, not only for them to develop notice in  
15 different languages through their website, but we  
16 required the provider-- we developed one in  
17 different languages that we required the providers to  
18 give to individuals so they had notice and consent if  
19 they were to use it in that way. So, lots-- so, if  
20 you can imagine from like April to May, lots went  
21 into developing this in a thoughtful way, certainly,  
22 we will learn, hopefully, more from the feedback that  
23 we receive in the evaluation on what worked and what  
24 was challenging. But lots of learning.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah. Thank you.

3 Thank you for walking me through that and I think you  
4 mentioned that the city is not keeping the  
5 information. I just want to get clarity that the  
6 Mayor's Fund is also not keeping any information. Is  
7 that true?

8 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yep. We have  
9 aggregate data.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Aggregate data.  
11 And, essentially, no one is keeping information  
12 except for, well--

13 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: The community-based  
14 organizations have the personal information.  
15 Everybody else just has aggregate data.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Awesome. Thank  
17 you. Thank you for that. Some of the CBO's that  
18 have historically served specific immigrant  
19 communities and have specific language expertise--  
20 and I think a lot of them are the ones that you kind  
21 of spoke to, were approached by a diverse array of  
22 immigrant New Yorkers in need. So, you know,  
23 immigrants went to CBO's, sometimes, for the first  
24 time. What support, including staffing and language  
25 assistance to at MOIA offered to these participating

2 CBO's? And that was one of the things that I even  
3 didn't anticipate in terms of just the new need that  
4 arose. And I think we're seeing that. We're talking  
5 about food. Who will continue to be in need and it  
6 might even grow over time as the economy continues to  
7 do what it is doing right now as it struggles. How  
8 are we supporting those CBO's to ensure that they  
9 have everything they need the van with the new  
10 immigrant populations are approaching them? Because  
11 they are trusted partners in these neighborhoods and  
12 they are going to them before they are coming to us  
13 as government.

14 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah. I can't  
15 necessarily-- and I don't know, Jean, if you can  
16 speak too much to the specifics of your question. I  
17 am not sure it has come to me in that way or been  
18 elevated in that way, exactly. I will just say a  
19 couple of things. One is we disseminated our  
20 resource guide, again, in 25 languages to all CBO's  
21 that we work with across all of our programs and  
22 outreach and engagement, recognizing, of course,  
23 that, simply because you are primarily serving one  
24 population, that doesn't mean that that is the only  
25 population that you might be reaching out to you.

2 So, that is one. Again, and looking at sort of the  
3 meal hub distribution, making sure that there was  
4 accessibility at those locations, and in terms of--  
5 this is something we have done more broadly with our  
6 legal programs. So, just making sure that the legal  
7 service providers have the ability to access  
8 interpretation services as they are serving New  
9 Yorkers and different languages, right? One of our  
10 goals with that program was to ensure that some level  
11 or some sort of ratio of a centralized appointment  
12 making system, so that communities that may be don't  
13 have a strong capacity around immigration legal  
14 services can still access those from providers that  
15 have the expertise. So, that is something that we  
16 have, since the outset, built into that program. So,  
17 that's not new to that sort of concept, if you will,  
18 is not new to us. Or not something we haven't  
19 thought about. But I don't know if, in this moment,  
20 Jean, there is anything more that we have either  
21 heard or responded to that you want to add.

22 JEAN BAE: Well, in terms of the-- I  
23 think, obviously, the best thing we could do, if we  
24 could, would be providing money to CBO organizations  
25 because that's what they need, but, unfortunately,

2 that's not up to the MOIA. So, but in terms of  
3 providing other assistance that they need, there are  
4 multiple things that we have done. Wine was signed  
5 know that you had asked the question about, you know,  
6 there was a funding provider selection process and,  
7 you know, there was a lot of thought that went into  
8 it and one of it was that we didn't want to just  
9 limit it to, you know, community-based organizations  
10 that are like known to have a lot of capacity and  
11 being able to do it because different CBO's reach  
12 different communities. So, you know, and closely  
13 working with them to make sure that, even the ones  
14 that may not necessarily have the largest capacities  
15 still can, you know, have sort of a connection  
16 through this fund was one of the ways. We have been-  
17 - A lot of times when CBO's come to us, you know,  
18 that is a very good way for us to figure out what is  
19 going on on the ground, etc. But they usually reach  
20 out to us because they are trying to access certain  
21 CB services or trying to figure out what the city  
22 policy is, but they are having a hard time working  
23 with the agency is or finding the right person. So,  
24 our outreach team and community service team usually  
25 work very closely to make sure that, you know, those

2 things are sort of-- I consider MOIA to be, a lot of  
3 times, working as kind of a bridge between, you know,  
4 the agencies and the providers that are on the  
5 ground. And that is the work that happens, you know,  
6 just about every day. I get those emails all the  
7 time and so, in that sense, I think, and a day-to-  
8 day, we work very closely with them to make sure that  
9 we provide support.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank  
11 you for that. And I guess this is my last kind of  
12 point and then I am going to hand it over to our  
13 committee counsel, Harbani Ahujah. But the pandemic  
14 caught us all off guard in a lot of ways. It was not  
15 only abrupt, but it so many different complexities to  
16 it and I think there is a lot of learning, so, as  
17 much as you can share with us about the learning of  
18 the programs with the Committee, that would be great.  
19 We want to support you. We understand that that is  
20 not MOIA's decision to the funding question, but it  
21 is our discussion collectively and we are hoping that  
22 you really build out a funding request that supports  
23 not just your institution-- your institution, as  
24 well, because you are taxed, your people working  
25 until midnight, and the nonprofit to build out a



2 system, whether it is going to come from the city  
3 next time or another foundation, but, there are a lot  
4 of things that we can do better. And I think that is  
5 the message here. We are relying on our  
6 organizations on the ground that need to stay alive  
7 and there are a lot of organizations that are going  
8 out of business right now as nonprofits because of  
9 capacity issues for a lot of different reasons. The  
10 more healthy they are, the more healthy this whole  
11 thing is and the more people we can reach. The most  
12 honorable people in our communities, our undocumented  
13 immigrants. So, I know we have the same vision and  
14 the same goals. The question is how we can work  
15 together to achieve that through funding. And we are  
16 expecting a 10 billion dollar cut in the next budget.  
17 What does that do for us? And so, I really want to  
18 make sure that we do something different and  
19 innovative year on the budget and we do that  
20 together.

21 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Thank you.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair.

23 I will now call on Council members for questions.

24 Council members, as a reminder, if you would like to

25 ask a question of the administration, please raise

2 your hand using the zoom raise hand function now.

3 Seeing no hands, we will close this panel. Thank

4 you, Commissioner and, Ms. Bae, for testifying.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you,

6 Commissioner. Good to see you.

7 COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Thank you so much.

8 Likewise. Nice to see so many faces.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Be safe.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: We will now turn to

11 public testimony. I would like to remind everyone,

12 unlike our typical Council hearings, we will be

13 calling on individuals one by one to testify and each

14 panelist will be given three minutes to speak.

15 Please begin once the Sergeant has started the timer.

16 Council members who have questions for a particular

17 panelist should raise their hand using the zoom raise

18 hand function and I will call on you after the

19 panelist has completed their testimony. For

20 panelists, once your name is called, a member of our

21 staff will unmute you and the Sergeant-at-arms will

22 give you the go-ahead to begin upon setting the

23 timer. Please wait for the Sgt. to announce that you

24 may speak in before delivering your testimony. I will

25 now like to know well, our first panel to testify. I

2 would like to welcome Maryanne Tharappel followed by  
3 Suzanna Saul and then Alba Lucero Villa. Maryanne  
4 Tharappel, you may begin when you're ready.

5 MARYANNE THARAPPEL: Good afternoon,  
6 honorable Chairperson and--

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will begin.

8 MARYANNE THARAPPEL: committee members.

9 Oh. My name is Maryanne Tharappel and I am the  
10 director of special projects for immigrant and  
11 refugee services in Catholic Charities community  
12 services, archdiocese of New York. We are grateful  
13 for today's hearing on the effects and  
14 recommendations addressing immigrant exclusion in the  
15 COVID-19 response at the state and federal levels.  
16 On a daily basis, members of our legal staff  
17 encounter immigrants who are struggling due to the  
18 impact that COVID-19 has on them, their families, and  
19 their community. They are struggling to understand  
20 next steps in their immigration cases, losing jobs,  
21 facing eviction, and battling her to educational  
22 resources for their children, caring for elderly  
23 family members, and confronting rising fears of  
24 leaving their homes for basic necessities as  
25 unwarranted enforcement actions targeting brown and

2 black communities continue to rise. This moment of  
3 enduring strife that again highlight the disparity  
4 and access to justice, life subsisting resources for  
5 black, indigenous, and people of color immigrants.  
6 These resolutions serve as necessities for human  
7 dignity. That existed prior to COVID-19, but have  
8 been exacerbated by this pandemic and confront  
9 obstacles that continue to stall due process for  
10 immigrants and harm fundamental humanitarian beliefs.  
11 Now, more than ever, we, the legal service provider  
12 community, need the Councils support financially and  
13 through advocacy to protect our black, brown, and  
14 immigrant New Yorkers. Catholic Charities strongly  
15 supports resolution number 1399 put forth by Chair  
16 Menchaca. Catholic Charities also recommends  
17 continued efforts to halt changes to the public  
18 charge rule which has a chilling effect on the most  
19 vulnerable New Yorkers, dissuading them from  
20 accessing much-needed benefits. Throughout the last  
21 six months, Catholic Charities provided over 4.4  
22 million dollars in direct relief assistance to 28,000  
23 people living in 8000 households. This is a mere  
24 fraction of the overall need. I would like to share  
25 just one story from the thousands served. Rosa came

2 to the US as a young child to escape brutal gang  
3 violence in Honduras. Now 20, she has been  
4 supporting her mother and other relatives through her  
5 job as a server, which she lost due to corona  
6 closures. She hoped to save some of her earnings for  
7 college which she started this fall. With the help  
8 of Catholic Charities and then nongovernmental  
9 dollars provided, Rosa was able to pay for rent for  
10 their apartment in Brooklyn and groceries for her  
11 family. This need continues. Catholic Charities  
12 also strongly supports resolution number 1404 put  
13 forward by Public Advocate Williams. As legal  
14 providers navigate the myriad of issues facing  
15 immigrant children and their families, day laborers  
16 and simultaneously confronting potential spending  
17 cuts while legal needs continue to rise, we implore  
18 the city Council and this administration to support  
19 legal providers like Catholic Charities who are  
20 responding to the pressures forced onto immigrants by  
21 this federal administration and they are only further  
22 complicated by COVID-19. Through our hotlines and  
23 the immigration court help desk, Catholic Charities  
24 has engaged with hundreds of immigrants seeking

2 assistance with these unknowns. Given the confusion  
3 and concerns legal representatives--

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time is up.

5 MARYANNE THARAPPEL: face on behalf of  
6 their clients, imagine the complete lack of clarity  
7 facing an immigrant without counsel. Facing language  
8 access hurdles and forced to navigate this uncertain  
9 time alone. This testimony and the individual  
10 stories shared, from the thousands of immigrants that  
11 Catholic Charities serves, highlights immigrant  
12 community exclusion from both state and federal  
13 recovery efforts and the exhausting plight of POC  
14 immigrants and those privileged to advocate for them.  
15 It is essential that we, elected advocates and  
16 providers, unite in the fight to ensure that support,  
17 safety, and dignity are provided for all who call New  
18 York in America home. We thank the New York City  
19 Council for its vision, leadership, and determination  
20 in protecting New York immigrants and I thank you for  
21 your time today.

22 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
23 testimony. I would like to now call on Susanna Saul.

24 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

2 SUSANNA SAUL: Good afternoon. I want  
3 to thank the city Council the Committee on  
4 Immigration for the opportunity to testified today.  
5 My name is Susanna Saul and I am the director of the  
6 immigration practice at Her Justice. We are a  
7 nonprofit organization that takes a pro bono first  
8 approach to provide free legal services to women  
9 living in poverty in New York City by leveraging the  
10 pro bono power of New York City's law firms. And we  
11 practice in the areas of family, matrimonial, and  
12 immigration law. I am testifying today to lift up  
13 specifically the experiences of our clients who are  
14 undocumented immigrants survivors of intimate partner  
15 violence and other forms of abuse. I am here to  
16 advocate for the urgent deployment of sufficient  
17 funding and services for the needs of all New Yorkers  
18 in this crisis. We call our client survivors for a  
19 reason. They have experienced unspeakable trauma and  
20 violence and have come through because they are  
21 resilient, resourceful, and they are focused on  
22 creating better futures for themselves and their  
23 children, but the current crisis is creating a  
24 situation that is sending many over the edge of  
25 poverty and health, both mental and physical. The

2 situations that exist right now speak for themselves  
3 in terms of the great needs that our clients are  
4 facing. So, I am just going to describe to you three  
5 clients from many that we are hearing about all day  
6 every day. Amelia experienced abuse by her husband  
7 for 29 years. She separated from him last year and  
8 now lives with her 19-year-old daughter. Amelia is  
9 diabetic and was infected with COVID-19 but  
10 recovered. She does not have health insurance and  
11 has to pay out-of-pocket for her medications. Her  
12 daughter is recovering from cancer and also can't  
13 work. Amelia worked part-time for a dry cleaner, but  
14 lost her job when the owner of the business died from  
15 COVID-19 and April and since then, she and her  
16 daughter are subsisting on her daughter's SSI  
17 payments which don't cover her rent. She relies on  
18 friends in her community to bring her food and her  
19 aunt brings her supplies like soap and detergent and  
20 she will likely be facing eviction as soon as the  
21 moratorium ends. Anna lives with her four children.  
22 Her abusive partner was paying the rent and they  
23 can't afford the rent anymore after a domestic  
24 violence incident. She fears eviction and is looking  
25 for an affordable place to live, but she has four



2 children and so, even when her public assistance  
3 grant is approved, she will likely be forced into an  
4 overcrowded housing situation with her children.

5 Terry was living with her abusive husband and called  
6 the police on a recent incident of abuse. She wants  
7 to go into the shelter, but she was told that there  
8 was. She is still waiting for space in the shelter.

9 I want to know that all of the survivors above are  
10 eligible for immigration relief, but, because of the  
11 backlogs and immigration, they won't obtain any  
12 status or work permit for at least four years and  
13 they are all living with the fear of deportation.

14 Some of our clients are working and some are not.

15 Many are providing essential services and it is truly  
16 absurd that, in our current crisis, these workers are  
17 considered the central and also illegal. The systems  
18 that were set up to serve our undocumented clients  
19 are failing. Undocumented survivors are also forced  
20 to rely on whatever social safety net they have in  
21 their communities, but their safety nets are thin or  
22 nonexistent because of the abuse and isolation. With  
23 fall and winter coming, the needs of the survivors  
24 are going to grow exponentially. The eviction  
25 moratorium is a solace, but is temporary and

2 precarious and the other vital need that undocumented  
3 New Yorkers are facing is access to technology. Many  
4 social services systems are operating, but only  
5 virtually your remote and our clients don't have  
6 access to computers and they are increasingly unable  
7 to afford their smart phones, their cell phones. So,  
8 they are not going to have any connection to help  
9 without access to the Internet or phone and--

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time is up.

11 SUSANNA SAUL: and also with libraries  
12 closed, you could usually access computers there, but  
13 they are closed. So, they're not going to be able to  
14 access food, legal assistance, dental health support,  
15 and healthcare. The health and safety of these  
16 individuals and their children are at risk. Please,  
17 the city Council must infuse additional resources  
18 into the existing systems and also call for the  
19 accountability of these systems to make sure that  
20 nobody falls through the cracks. COVID-19 has taught  
21 us that, when we neglect human lives in the city, all  
22 of our lives are put at risk. Thank you.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
24 testimony. I would like to call on Alba Lucero  
25 Villa. You may begin when you are ready.

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will  
3 begin now.

4 ALBA LUCERO VILLA: Thank you. I want  
5 to thank committee Chair Carlos Menchaca and the rest  
6 of the city Council for holding this important  
7 hearing. My name is Alba Lucero Villa and I am the  
8 executive director of NMCR, Northern Manhattan  
9 Coalition for Immigrant Rates. Since 1982, NMCR New  
10 York City's immigrant community working tirelessly to  
11 educate, defend, and protect the rights of  
12 immigrants. Most of the clients we serve are from  
13 low income-- low income immigrants from the  
14 Caribbean, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle  
15 East. Some have lived here their entire lives,  
16 others are recent immigrants. Some are undocumented.  
17 Others are legal permanent residents who are still in  
18 dire fear of deportation and often their first  
19 experience with any kind of basic legal services or  
20 social service is at NMCR or a similar organization.  
21 Before COVID-19, I can tell you that on any given  
22 year we served about 8000 families, back, and the  
23 last two months, and one month alone, we have  
24 received about 4000 calls for help and it is not just  
25 for legal services or immigration related matters.

2 It's for food and cash assistance and just any kind  
3 of assistance that we can provide or we can point  
4 them in the right direction to. So, this COVID-19  
5 pandemic has really exposed many of the systematic  
6 failures of our country and the disparity that exists  
7 in communities of color, particularly in the larger  
8 immigrant community. Today, you heard from Enoc, one  
9 of our workers center participants about the  
10 discrimination he faced as an immigrant worker and  
11 how the pandemic changed his life and how NMCR'  
12 workers center helped him survive when he lost his  
13 job as a restaurant worker. You heard how he works  
14 from sunrise to sunset seven days a week just to put  
15 food on his family's table. But what he didn't tell  
16 you was that this morning at four in the morning, his  
17 cousin died. He was his age and he left behind a  
18 small child and a pregnant partner and yet, when I  
19 told him not to worry about coming in testifying, he  
20 begged me to let him come because, for him, it was so  
21 important to have a voice and to have his voice heard  
22 today in front of all of you. He rushed off to a  
23 family's service because, as a family, they are  
24 uniting to figure out how they are going to help that  
25 small child, his wife, and his unborn child survived

2 now that his cousin is no longer here. NMCR has met  
3 the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic by working  
4 with workers like Enoc and we rapidly adapted our  
5 programs to meet our clients and community needs. We  
6 never ran a pantry. We don't have funds for food.  
7 Yet, with the support of local businesses, with  
8 donations, we figured out how to distribute food and  
9 meals every week since March. We stayed open during  
10 the pandemic. We continued dispatching jobs. We  
11 distributed PPE to workers. We ran legal clinics.  
12 We did Know Your Rights. We need to add weekly  
13 worker meetings and distributed, with the help of the  
14 Man's Fund and MOIA, more than 850,000 in cash  
15 assistance, combined with individual donations that  
16 we received and fund raised. And we did this all  
17 while I was trying to juggle the fear of furloughs  
18 and funding cuts of our own and keep my staff healthy  
19 and safe and employed. So, our workers center, just  
20 to give you an example, a fully operating worker  
21 center with the physical space--

22 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is up.

23 ALBA LUCERO VILLA: really did  
24 everything we could to stay open, despite it being  
25 really difficult. I was appointed to the Mayor Bill

2 DeBlasio's labor and workforce sector advisor  
3 counselor and discuss, alongside with fellow leaders,  
4 one thing became clear. The only way to move forward  
5 for an inclusive recovery is to put workers centers  
6 at the forefront of leading that effort. As New York  
7 City continues to reopen and think about the threat  
8 of a second wave, we won't be able to fully address  
9 any disparate impact of COVID-19 on communities of  
10 color without properly funding the grassroots  
11 organizations that serve essential workers who have  
12 worked long hours alongside dangerous conditions.  
13 So, despite being a lifeline to our community and the  
14 organization itself being emigrant lead with 98  
15 percent staff of color, our existence, too, is  
16 vulnerable to funding cuts. Any funding cuts would  
17 only deep in the disparate impact of our communities  
18 of color and this pandemic, so we must recognize that  
19 emigrant New Yorkers are often living in an  
20 unimaginable fear, not only of COVID-19, but of their  
21 mere existence in the US. They are not going to call  
22 311 for help, but they will come to us. So, I  
23 implore the city Council to really seize this moment  
24 in history as an opportunity to be on the right side  
25 of change by providing community-based organizations

2 with more resources, not less, than those we need to  
3 be able to serve our communities. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, Alba.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
6 testimony. I will now call on Chair Menchaca for any  
7 questions.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: I don't have any  
9 questions. Everything that you have stated have  
10 those accelerated my commitment to you to build  
11 protections for all of you who are doing so much of  
12 the work that we have demanded of you. And so, thank  
13 you for your testimony and I think you are going to  
14 see a lot of that through the panels. And so, I made  
15 it very clear to the Commissioner who did a great job  
16 of holding the lot of that funding hole in the last  
17 budget. I don't know is that is going to happen  
18 again with 10 million dollars on its way for-- 10  
19 billion dollars of cuts that are on their way. And  
20 so, this story needs to stays solid and in front of  
21 people so that OMB and the Commissioner can deliver,  
22 yet again, for our communities with the support of  
23 the city Council. So, thank you and my best to Enoc  
24 and his family.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Chair.

3 We will now turn to questions from other Council  
4 members. Consult members, again, as a reminder, you  
5 may use the zoom raise hand function if you have a  
6 question. Seeing no hands, we will move on to our  
7 next panel. Our next panel, I would like to welcome  
8 Manuel Castro to testify next. After Mr. Castro, we  
9 will hear from Analilia Leon, Ligia Guallpa, Yesenia  
10 Mata, and then Nadia Marin. Manuel Castro, you may  
11 begin when you are ready.

12 MANUEL CASTRO: Thank you. And thank  
13 you to the Committee on Immigration and Chair Carlos  
14 Menchaca for inviting us to testify on this really  
15 critical hearing today. My name is Manuel Castro and  
16 I am the executive director of NICE, New Immigrant  
17 Community Empowerment. And I want to share a little  
18 bit about, you know, our work on the ground, but also  
19 the results of a major survey that we have been  
20 conducting over the past six months. Since the  
21 outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City,  
22 NICE has been responding to the crisis from our  
23 workers center in central Queens, providing  
24 everything from thousands of pounds of food  
25 assistance, nearly 2 million dollars in cash



2 assistance, and helping dozens of families with  
3 COVID-19 burial assistance. At the same time, we  
4 partnered with CUNY and surveyed 6000 immigrant  
5 families and workers, all registered with our  
6 organization on the impact of COVID-19 on their  
7 lives. Families and workers who did not qualify for  
8 COVID-19 relief benefits such as the care is act and  
9 unemployment benefits, most undocumented immigrants,  
10 newly arrived immigrants, day laborers, cleaning  
11 workers, and other low-paid workers, is primarily in  
12 Queens. So, like I said, I will focus my testimony  
13 on our preliminary findings of this survey, but I  
14 will make sure to get the full report to this  
15 committee and to the Councils so that you can see for  
16 yourselves the kinds of experiences are members in  
17 this community have had to endure over the past six  
18 months. Our survey really presents the picture of  
19 great hardship due to the pandemic, but, most  
20 critically, an increase in alarming vulnerabilities  
21 on immigrants in New York City. Not just the  
22 physical, but also the mental health aspects of this  
23 COVID pandemic on both the families and the children.  
24 And so, as a result, created or has been creating, as  
25 we analyze these surveys findings, a picture of the

2 community at very high risk. So, for instance, 38  
3 percent of the respondents of the survey said that  
4 they had symptoms. COVID related symptoms. This is  
5 a number three times higher than the 11 percent of  
6 all New Yorkers that responded to the same question.  
7 Moreover, NICE's survey shows a shocking 10.4 of the  
8 respondents reported a family member had died due to  
9 COVID-19. And so, this is exacerbated because of the  
10 lack of access of healthcare in this community.  
11 Respondents feared seeking medical care, dentist by,  
12 you know, the news and the importance of seeking this  
13 medical assistance. 54 percent--

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time is up.

15 MANUEL CASTRO: the fear of seeking  
16 medical care due to their regular status and 49  
17 percent said that they fear seeking treatment because  
18 someone in their family was undocumented. I would  
19 also, before I break, I would like to mention the  
20 economic impact of the families. 90 percent of the  
21 respondents said that they had not worked in the  
22 prior three months of the pandemic. Then, by June,  
23 99 percent of the respondents said that they had zero  
24 percent of savings left. This is most critically  
25 because many of the respondents said that this might

2 lead to homelessness. 75 percent of the respondents  
3 reported being at risk of homelessness. This is  
4 particularly worrisome because of the NICE  
5 respondents with children. They had 2.2 children per  
6 household. So, this is a tremendous amount of  
7 information that we can use to point to the grave  
8 emergency that our community is dealing with.  
9 Lastly, I will say that, you know, in the next couple  
10 of months, NICE will be focusing on making sure that  
11 our communities have access to the potential vaccine  
12 and to make sure that they get accurate and reliable  
13 information. I think that is something that we will  
14 have to start thinking about as a community. And I  
15 would like to say thank you to the city Council, to  
16 the members of this committee, especially our Council  
17 member, Danny Dromm, Council member Francisco Moya,  
18 Council member Carlos Menchaca. We've only been able  
19 to do this work because of the years of support from  
20 the community Council and the infrastructure that we  
21 have been able to build as a result. So, thank you  
22 so much.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, Manuel.

24

25

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
3 testimony. Next, we will turn to Analilia Leon. And  
4 we will have Ligia Guallpa help him with translation.

5 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will  
6 begin.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Analilia, you may  
8 begin when you are ready.

9 ANALILIA LEON: [Speaking Spanish]

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [Speaking Spanish]

11 ANALILIA LEON: [Speaking Spanish]

12 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is us.

13 ANALILIA LEON: [Speaking Spanish]

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: [Speaking Spanish]

15 LIGIA GUALLPA: I'm going to briefly  
16 translate what was said. My name is Analilia. I am  
17 a house cleaner and a member of Worker Justice  
18 Project. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at  
19 the immigration hearing. Before the pandemic, I had  
20 a full-time job as a cleaner to pay my rent and my  
21 food. When the pandemic hit, I was out of work. The  
22 first week, we lived in fear and despair without  
23 knowing what would happen. We also face the greatest  
24 things of losing a family member. My brother-in-law  
25 died of coronavirus in Brooklyn. In this pandemic,

2 they only thing we had, it was ourselves to keep  
3 moving forward. While the city closed, my  
4 organization, worker Justice Project, stayed open to  
5 help the community. During the pandemic, it was  
6 women that formed the committee to make and  
7 distribute 10,000 safety masks for essential workers.  
8 We distributed food pantry, hot meals from our center  
9 in Williamsburg, Sunset Park, and [inaudible  
10 02:56:28]. It is not to show off, but it was me, the  
11 women, who were in the streets and from our centers  
12 leading all of emergency response and solidarity work  
13 and the women. In this pandemic, my colleagues and I  
14 learned how to sew, cook food with good seasoning,  
15 and became more united as a community. We learned  
16 that the only people save the people because we work  
17 together. Although this country benefits from our  
18 labor and the taxes we have to pay, the federal  
19 government was not there when we needed them the  
20 most. Now, while the city--

21 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Ligia, I think we  
22 lost it. Ligia?

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay. I think  
24 there were some technical difficulties with Ligia.  
25 We will come back to her if she's able to get back

2 on. In the meantime, we will turn to testimony from  
3 Yesenia Mata.

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will  
5 start now.

6 YESENIA MATA: My name is Yesenia Mata.  
7 I am the executive director of La Colmena. I wanted  
8 to thank Chairman Menchaca for holding this critical  
9 hearing at this critical time and thank you to your  
10 staff of powerful [Speaking Spanish] Lorena, Isabel,  
11 Harbani, for working with us to shore workers have a  
12 voice. La Colmena is a Staten Island based worker  
13 and MO grant rights organization. Like some of my  
14 colleagues here, La Colmena kept its doors open  
15 during the pandemic because we knew we needed to be a  
16 space for immigrant families to speak up. At a time  
17 when the world was shutting down and the federal  
18 government failed to appropriately respond to the  
19 COVID-19 pandemic, immigrants were losing their jobs,  
20 getting sick and dying from the deadly virus. We  
21 recently released a report with the worker Institute  
22 at Cornell University to highlight the struggle of  
23 Staten Island's Latin X immigrant community during  
24 one of the most difficult times in our nation. I  
25 want to highlight some key findings of the report

2 which include that despite the economic and social  
3 vulnerabilities, working-class immigrants, Latin X  
4 immigrants spend more than 91 percent of their income  
5 on housing and basic consumer good, serving an  
6 essential source of revenue for local businesses on  
7 Staten Island. 88 percent of surveyed workers were  
8 unemployed for three months, losing their jobs  
9 between February and the beginning of May. For the  
10 vast majority of these workers, 97 percent did not  
11 qualify for unemployment benefits and did not receive  
12 a government stimulus check. 98 percent of the  
13 workers also did not qualify for any form of pandemic  
14 relief. The exploitive working conditions that  
15 immigrant workers experienced prior to the COVID-19  
16 crisis, including heightened instances of wage theft  
17 and discrimination and a lack of formal work  
18 contracts, workplace protections, and paid sick leave  
19 will persist and deepen during the reopening plan in  
20 the absence of a policy changes, pandemic relief, and  
21 is statewide initiative that would adequately address  
22 these issues. I have submitted the full reports of  
23 the committee and I really look forward to working  
24 with you all to ensure that our immigrant community  
25 is not forgotten during these times. Thank you.

2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
3 testimony. We will now go back to Ligia Guallpa.

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Ligia, are you  
6 there?

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Okay. I think she  
8 still might be having technical issues. We will move  
9 on. Next, we will be hearing from Nadia Marin. It  
10 may begin when you are ready.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin now.

12 NADIA MARIN: Okay. Thank you. Thank you  
13 for giving us the opportunity to give testimony. I  
14 am here on behalf of the National Day Labor  
15 Organizing Network, NDLO. NDLO has 60 member  
16 organizations now nationwide and many of them are day  
17 laborers centers similar to the ones that exist here  
18 in New York City, including La Colmena, Worker  
19 Justice Project, Northern Manhattan Coalition for  
20 Immigrant Rights NICE, Catholic Charities of the  
21 Bronx, and all of them have provided their own  
22 testimony and detailed reports. We just want to  
23 begin by expressing our support for the resolutions  
24 of Council members Menchaca, Eugene, and Moya and  
25 Public Advocate Williams. Without going into



2 details, but just thank you for highlighting the  
3 crucial issues and for calling on the state and  
4 federal governments to support and create policies  
5 that support, rather than persecute and exclude  
6 immigrants. I want to highlight just a couple of  
7 them and then add a few recommendations. On the  
8 moratorium on deportation proceedings, recently, the  
9 New Orleans Worker Center for Racial Justice wrote a  
10 letter and we signed on to it, along with many  
11 others, calling on the Department of Homeland  
12 security to have an immediate moratorium on  
13 enforcement due to the devastating emergency caused  
14 by hurricane Laura in Lake Charles in Louisiana. The  
15 DHS has refused to stop the enforcement that  
16 terrorizes the immigrant community and in moments  
17 when they are most vulnerable to exploitation as  
18 workers and as community members who need help.  
19 Hurricane season is just beginning now and it is on  
20 track to be particularly devastating this year. And  
21 New York City now has to prepare, respond to the  
22 current pandemic, preparing case of hurricanes, and  
23 then also, you know, deal with the additional terror  
24 that is caused by ICE enforcement. And I think, you  
25 know, talk a little bit more about how to do it, but,

2 effectively, and stealing with crisis on top of  
3 crisis on top of crisis. Right? On the exclusion of  
4 undocumented workers from relief funding, when the  
5 pandemic began, our members knew that day laborers  
6 and other immigrants would be excluded from the  
7 federal response and from state despite contributing  
8 billions of dollars. We created and immigrant  
9 workers safety net fund and we are proud to have  
10 distributed about 1 million so far and continue to do  
11 so. But we also did a report and I am going to  
12 attach it with the testimony. And one of the  
13 findings of the report put together by Prof. Nick  
14 Theodore at the University of Chicago is the  
15 importance of support for organizations in addition  
16 to the cash assistance for individuals. So, we are  
17 calling on the city to work directly with day  
18 laborers centers, designate them. Work with them as  
19 emergency response centers to recognize the work that  
20 they do. Connect them to the current emergency  
21 preparedness and response infrastructure which will  
22 strengthen the city's work and strengthen the work of  
23 the organizations at the same time. Continue to work  
24 on strengthening health and safety--

25 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is up.

2 NADIA MARIN: and support also the  
3 statewide legislation that would create the fund for  
4 excluded workers, S8277, because that would create a  
5 fund where excluded workers would be able to access  
6 the funds, undocumented, formerly incarcerated, and  
7 another excluded worker populations. We really  
8 appreciate your support for day laborers and all  
9 immigrant workers.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
11 testimony. I will now turn it back to Chair Menchaca  
12 for questions.

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, Harbani.  
14 And I just want to say thank you to the whole panel.  
15 You have done an incredible work in the last six  
16 months and I think we are at a critical point where  
17 that work has not slowed down at all and you are  
18 needing more resources, support. And so, that  
19 testimony really pointing to the tension issues. I  
20 want to talk a little bit about the fund and your  
21 partnership with MOIA and the Soros funding that came  
22 in. Can one of you talk a little bit about what that  
23 impact, how that impacted your organization? I heard  
24 a lot of positive things, as well, so I want to live  
25 to that up that you were able to get funding out to

2 families. But this is the opportunity right now to  
3 share with me, the public, but also the committee and  
4 the Council on what worked and how we can support you  
5 in capacity issues or other things that we can  
6 anticipate moving forward with crisis coming in in  
7 the future or even another phase of COVID. Anyone  
8 who wants to speak on that. Alba?

9 ALBA LUCERO VILLA: Okay. There we go.  
10 Okay. Thank you. So, I want to say that the most  
11 helpful, obviously, in addition to having funds to  
12 redistribute, because there was no way we would have  
13 been able to raise that amount of money to deliver, I  
14 think what was very helpful was having the money come  
15 in advance, right? And so, while I have to say that,  
16 by myself, I was so worried about just getting money  
17 into the hands of community members, that I told  
18 everybody. Just give us money. Even if you don't  
19 give us any administrative costs, give me money I  
20 want to distribute. Right? That was my initial  
21 feeling. And then, fortunately, it came with some,  
22 you know, some administrative costs, which I was more  
23 than happy to take any of it because I just wanted  
24 any kind of money. But it was actually a huge  
25 undertaking and I was fortunate to have the staff

2 capacity at that point. It was early on and so wise  
3 still was ends, you know, making a dollar out of 10  
4 cents. I was making a dollar out of 50 cents for my  
5 staff, but I was able to really put my whole staff on  
6 the project and we got it done and it worked out. A  
7 few months later, you know, I'm running into reduced  
8 hours. How am I going to pay my staff? We have  
9 capacity issues. I don't know if I would've been  
10 able to deliver that. Right? That now versus a few  
11 months ago. So, having the cash advance was critical  
12 for us to be able to do it. And, you know, it is  
13 something that I wish all of our city funding  
14 contracts were like and could to because we wouldn't  
15 be in the capacity constraints that we are as a small  
16 organization that, you know, relies heavily on city  
17 Council funding if we got money upfront and  
18 [inaudible 03:08:10]. The previous organization in I  
19 ran was mostly foundation run and so we got the money  
20 and did the work. Here, it was waived for the money  
21 and we pray and hope for the reimbursements. And I  
22 understand that it is a complicated procedure, but  
23 having that be different in this instance, I think,  
24 was very helpful. That said, it took a lot more  
25 time, staff time, everybody's time than I ever

2 imagined. I think a lot of us had huge challenges.  
3 We got it done. Now, if we were given the same  
4 amount I don't know if we could do it because of our  
5 constraints because of the funding cuts that have  
6 happened, the looming ones. And so, what I say now  
7 would be different than I would say a few months ago.  
8 I think where you would need definitely a lot more  
9 money and administrative support. But I too want to  
10 commend the money was paid first and enabled us to,  
11 you know, really get what we needed and didn't have  
12 to do the work. But at NMCIR, you know, we had 24  
13 people on this. If I didn't have 24 people on this,  
14 I'm not sure how I would have done it.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank  
16 you for explaining that. And I think that speaks to  
17 capacity today versus yesterday and capacity in the  
18 future. And so, the goal here is to keep you all  
19 alive, but not just alive. Allowing you to thrive in  
20 this environment and really institutionalize that  
21 engagement to communities who are vulnerable and are  
22 coming to you both for they are coming to government.  
23 And I think that is the important piece which means  
24 that you are a vital component to government work,  
25 nongovernmental-- as a nongovernmental agency. And

2 so, I think that is going to be an important thing to  
3 ensure that we get the message across to the city  
4 Council, through our budget negotiations. I don't  
5 know if the Council member and Chair of the Finance  
6 Committee Dromm is here, but these are the kind of  
7 things that are important to tease out. You are not  
8 just a provider of service. You are in an emergency  
9 way providing a very vital service. And so, I saw  
10 Yesenia Mata and Manny Castro raise their hands. Can  
11 we unmute them and give us a little bit of may be  
12 something new that we haven't heard so far.

13 YESENIA MATA: So, just, I think, as he  
14 mentioned, Chairman Carlos Menchaca, and Taylor labor  
15 centers have, at times, been overlooked, but, in  
16 situations like these, we have been very vital, if  
17 anything, doing the work that some elected officials  
18 haven't done or are not even doing. And that is  
19 exactly what happened here in Staten Island. We  
20 weren't getting any help and, to this day, we haven't  
21 received any help from any elected official, when  
22 this pandemic had, you know, when I tell everybody,  
23 where do you think everybody was going? They kept  
24 coming to La Colmena. And it got to a point where it  
25 was scary and it was stressful and, to this day,

2 stressful. And in all honesty, like just so this is  
3 the reality. I haven't taken a day off since the  
4 pandemic hit. I have been here every day on site  
5 and, again, when no help of any elected official here  
6 on the island. If anything, it is been us figuring  
7 it out. So, with this Mayor's Fund at the time when  
8 it came, obviously, we were very excited because we  
9 wanted to support our immigrant community  
10 economically and we think that the administrative  
11 costs did come up front and I think that is the type  
12 of support that we should be receiving. Getting  
13 administrative costs up front. But one of the things  
14 is that, when sleet did have the funds, we didn't  
15 realize the amount of work it was going to be.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: You needed more.

17 YESENIA MATA: And the amount of work  
18 it was going to be. For example, I mean, we're  
19 providing all of these vital services. Legal  
20 services, food distribution, dispatching people and  
21 responding to everything that is being thrown at the  
22 immigrant community, but also with this fund, that  
23 was something additional that we had to do and I  
24 didn't have a team of 24 people and I think I'll  
25 above brought it up very well. It requires a team of



2 24+ people to be able to do this because, to screen  
3 people, it requires a lot of work upload the funds.  
4 That's an additional uploading the funds. On top of  
5 that, to schedule people to come and pick up the  
6 cards or if you even send it by mail, that is also  
7 frustrating because you don't know if it is going to  
8 take it to the person and the people call in there  
9 like, well, I never received my card. Where is my  
10 card? So, you see, it is all these fundamental  
11 things. So, our office-- and we have recorded the  
12 amount of calls. We received over like 6000 phone  
13 calls. And it got to the point that not only that,  
14 but when people heard that La Colmena was giving  
15 money or whatnot, like there was so many people at La  
16 Colmena every day. We want money. And, we  
17 understood what they were going through. If, in the  
18 future, this is provided, more administrative cost  
19 must be provided. Moore's support must be provided  
20 also, from the Mayor's Office, not just give the  
21 money, here's administrative costs, but there should  
22 be more support, especially towards organizations  
23 like ours and not just to doing services via web.  
24 No. We are doing services on site and that was very  
25 frustrating. We are overstressed still. So, that is

2 the reality of what was going on when it came to  
3 distributing these funds.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, Yesenia,  
5 for just for clarity on it. I want to allow Manny  
6 Castro to talk a little bit about this question and I  
7 see Council member Dromm, as well, raising his hand.  
8 So, offer an opportunity for him to ask a question.

9 MANUEL CASTRO: Yeah. Thank you Council  
10 member. Just want to say or want to send a big shout  
11 out to the Day Labor Center organizations because,  
12 despite all the challenges, despite the heavy list, I  
13 think the headline here is that we were able to take  
14 on this money and disperse it to our communities in  
15 record time. I mean, this wasn't like 30,000, 40,000  
16 dollars. We're talking about millions of dollars  
17 that needed to be dispersed urgently to undocumented  
18 communities and I think there were no better  
19 organizations to do this than our, you know, the  
20 organizations here. We're talking about La Colmena,  
21 W JP, Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant  
22 Rights, Catholic Charities. And like really that  
23 should be listed because it was a tremendous amount  
24 of work. On our end at NICE, we were able to support  
25 about 2000 people in small increments of money and we

2 were able to lift up like this sort of infrastructure  
3 and to all of this in one month. I mean, like, you  
4 know, let's frankly evaluate who else could do that.  
5 You know? And let's think about that what else could  
6 we do in partnership with other city agencies. I am  
7 thinking about housing. Right? There is a housing  
8 crisis right now. How do these agencies look to us  
9 and support us in building infrastructure to get that  
10 support to our communities? I'm thinking about  
11 healthcare. I mean, there is just a lot of things  
12 that we are ready and able to work on together, but  
13 that support and infrastructure needs to continue.  
14 And I would like to say that this is nothing new. I,  
15 myself, was an intern at an organization working to  
16 help undocumented immigrants after 9/11 and so I saw  
17 the same issues that I'm seeing now. And were  
18 talking about 19, 20 years later. Right? And seeing  
19 the same issues. Same thing after hurricane Sandy.  
20 We have to remember how day labor groups and day  
21 labor workers like really stood up for New York. And  
22 were doing the same thing again and I hope no one  
23 forgets that. Thank you so much for this and I  
24 council member Dromm wanted to speak. And really I  
25 want to say that our communities felt that, you know,

2 councilmembers, especially Council member Dromm in  
3 Jackson Heights, we really felt your leadership.  
4 Your staff, you know, really championing our issues  
5 and our needs at the front line in the grassroots. I  
6 mean, when members are coming to you saying that your  
7 family members are dying, their family members are  
8 dying, so a lot on staff, right? And to have the  
9 support of the Counsel is very meaningful. Because  
10 often you feel like-- you hear the news and you feel  
11 like what is government doing? You know, but, at the  
12 least, we know that the city government has our  
13 backs. I'll stop there. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, Manny.  
15 Council member Dromm?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Am I unmute it now?  
17 Can you hear me?

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Yes. Your time  
19 will begin.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Thank you, Chair  
21 Menchaca. And I just want to say thank you, Manny,  
22 for the compliment. It is a pleasure to be able to  
23 work with you and the work that you are doing in the  
24 community is so wonderful and so vital to the  
25 residents who live here in Jackson Heights and

2 Elmhurst who are day laborers [inaudible 03:17:45].

3 I'm very, very honored to be able to work with you.

4 I just wanted to go back to the other woman from

5 State Island and I just wanted to know because Chair

6 Menchaca mentioned, as the Chair of the Finance

7 Committee, we pretty held-- if I'm not mistaken,

8 Chair Menchaca-- immigrant groups, you know, that

9 didn't get many cuts in terms of the existing budget.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: That's right.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: So, I'm just

12 wondering-- and please-- am I right?

13 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: That's correct.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: So you were

15 fighting [inaudible 03:18:20] and you called them,

16 you know, painless so they did not get cuts. So the

17 woman was from Staten Island, she applied for

18 funding? Does she know how to five for funding? Has

19 she asked the city Council member from Staten Island

20 for funding and as she part of the bigger pot of

21 immigrant funding that we have?

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And if we can

23 unmute Yesenia to talk a little bit about that.

24 Everyone that we spoke to today did receive funding

25 from the day laborer funding that the city Council

2 gave. And maybe, Yesenia, you can talk a little bit  
3 about support that might not be coming from the  
4 funding that the Council gives, but other support you  
5 might be looking at from Council members or other  
6 elected officials from Staten Island.

7           YESENIA MATA:       Perfect. Yeah. So,  
8 that's a really good question. So, like I said  
9 before, when the pandemic head, immediately,  
10 everything was closed here on Staten Island. The  
11 only center that did remain open was La Colmena. We  
12 did keep promoting and indicating that we were out  
13 here and that we needed support. There was a time  
14 when-- My staff itself is very small and I should've  
15 said that before. Like my staff is very small and my  
16 staff, and itself, was here every day trying to  
17 support the community and we did try to reach out to  
18 certain elected officials. And people just saw the  
19 work that we were doing. And, again, no one at the  
20 time or still has come to even provide an era try to  
21 help us to say like, hey, you know, you could apply  
22 for this type of grant or you could apply for these  
23 types of services. And, in my thing, this is where  
24 it needs to stop that-- I get a bit frustrated at  
25 times when people tell me why don't you reach out to

2 the selected official or you should do this. Why in  
3 times like this, in times of crisis where my center  
4 itself is trying to maintain itself open where I am  
5 here every day and so are my staff risking our lives  
6 every day here, right? It is to come to a point  
7 where elected officials-- and I'm talking  
8 specifically on Staten Island-- do the job and go to  
9 those centers that are open and it is obvious that we  
10 are open. When you come to La Colmena, the amount of  
11 people we have here, the Latin X immigrants, the  
12 amount of actions that we have done, I guess they  
13 just got back to that point, right? We've been here.  
14 We have been asking people for support and the only  
15 individuals that have come out to support is like  
16 Catholic Charities, Chasi, and have provided us food.  
17 And we have partnered up with these organizations.  
18 Also New York Immigration Coalition and [inaudible  
19 03:21:08], Gualitas, that gave us-- when they saw  
20 the work that we're doing, you see? So, this is the  
21 work that the elected officials should be doing here  
22 on Staten Island. Like when [inaudible 03:21:19],  
23 New York Immigration Coalition and saw that need, and  
24 the mayors-- MOIA, they gave us money. That  
25 Catholic Charities gave us food. All these other

2 nonprofits came out and said, can we common  
3 volunteer? So, has elected officials, and tried to  
4 sit down with us and say, can we help you apply for  
5 this grant or for this service? No. They haven't.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Okay. Thank you.  
7 That's why it's a good thing you're on this hearing  
8 because now you've been heard and you've been heard  
9 by me, the finance Chair. So we'll try to see what  
10 we can do to help you. I mean, it's a very difficult  
11 time, obviously, because of the pandemic, even with  
12 Council funding with Chair Menchaca will try to work  
13 a little bit more closely with you, as well. So,  
14 keep up the good work and I hear you and my heart  
15 goes out to you and I thank you and we'll follow up  
16 and make sure you're heard more. Thank you. Thank  
17 you, Chair Menchaca.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank  
19 you.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: And I am going to  
21 have to jump. I have a 3:30 call. I'm sorry.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay. Thank you so  
23 much. Like you said, we will follow up and maybe we  
24 can organize some elected in Staten Island and just  
25 reengage and help them.



2 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Yeah. And it's  
3 been a great hearing. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah. Thank you.  
5 Thank you.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER DROMM: Thank you very  
7 much.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you, Council  
9 member. I'm now going to call on Ligia Guallpa.

10 LIGIA GUALLPA: Thank you so much for  
11 allowing me to briefly share my thoughts on the  
12 emergency response, but also quickly respond to  
13 actually the question was brought up, as well, in  
14 terms of the cash really. My name is Ligia Guallpa.  
15 I'm the executive director of Worker Justice Project.  
16 We are also workers center that has been on the front  
17 lines responding to the COVID-19. We specifically  
18 run three worker centers throughout Brooklyn covering  
19 from the north, which is Williamsburg, to central  
20 self. I mean, to central Brooklyn, which is Sunset  
21 Park and Benson [inaudible 03:23:24]. As a workers'  
22 center, we have-- reach out to close to 8000 workers  
23 literally as Analilia said, distributing almost  
24 12,000 masks to workers offering close to 2 million  
25 dollars in cash relief and, most importantly,

2 providing, organizing and legal support to workers  
3 that were facing with labor rights issues and housing  
4 issues. And I'm just going to stop because I know a  
5 lot has mentioned already in terms of the role that  
6 worker centers have played in the recovery and I just  
7 don't want to add because I think a lot has been said  
8 which is very similar work that has happened in  
9 Brooklyn. It's very similar to other parts. I do  
10 want to highlight, I think, the importance-- many of  
11 her worker centers, will Worker Justice Project,  
12 Brooklyn, I think we would've not been able to do the  
13 emergency response work if it wasn't because a lot of  
14 our organizations had the infrastructure thinks to  
15 the day labor workforce initiative. The day labor  
16 workforce initiative, I think, though something  
17 important, which is making sure that there is  
18 dignified spaces for workers not only to continue to  
19 organize, but really to transform and reinvent  
20 ourselves as emergency response centers. And I  
21 cannot highlight the importance of understanding how  
22 vital day labor centers are and the importance of  
23 keeping an engaging day labor centers, not only to  
24 see us as like, yes, we are doing my great emergency  
25 response work, but thinking through about what role

2 we will continue to play and rebuilding the  
3 infrastructure that are needed to rebuild in our  
4 neighborhoods. And I'm specifically thinking about a  
5 lot of our workers centers have become hubs not only  
6 for food pantries, have become hubs for mass making,  
7 has become hubs where workers have relied going to  
8 use bathrooms when a lot of like delivery workers  
9 couldn't use. So, now we are thinking through about  
10 how not only continue to support and fund workers  
11 centers, day labor centers, specifically, as  
12 emergency response centers. I think we have  
13 continued to forget that workers also play a critical  
14 role as emergency responders.

15 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is up.

16 LIGIA GUALLPA: I'm just going to close  
17 with this. We saw it in 9/11. We saw when hurricane  
18 Sandy hit. It was not only workers centers that were  
19 doing the response work, but it was also day laborers  
20 themselves who were risking their lives to do food  
21 delivery, deliver cash, do masks, go out in the  
22 street. So, when we think about who are the  
23 emergency responders, we need to start thinking not  
24 only a workers centers, but also day laborers. And  
25 how we prepare and equip workers centers and workers

2 as emergency response centers and infrastructures  
3 that we need to build for the next wave of COBID-19.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah. Well said.  
5 Well said. Thank you to this panel.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
7 testimony. Seeing no other Council member questions,  
8 we will be moving on to the next panel. I would now  
9 like to welcome Elizabeth Oh to testify. After  
10 Elizabeth, we will hear from Sophia Gurule, Rebecca  
11 Espinoza, Nyasa Hickey, Michael J. Eatroff and then  
12 Rex Chen. Elizabeth Oh, you may begin when you're  
13 ready.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will start.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Elizabeth, I'm  
16 sorry. I think you're having an audio issue. We  
17 will work on resolving that with you. In the  
18 meantime, I am going to pass it to Sophia Gurule.  
19 You may begin when you are ready.

20 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

21 SOPHIA GURULE: Good afternoon. My name  
22 is Sophia Elena Gurule and I am the policy counselor  
23 to the immigration at the Bronx Defenders. I also  
24 represent immigrant New Yorkers in deportation  
25 proceedings through the New York Immigrant Family

2 Unity Project also known as NYFUP. The Bronx  
3 Defenders strongly supports all resolutions before  
4 the committee today, but highlights specifically the  
5 public advocate resolution calling on the DOJ to  
6 issue guidance that establishes EOIR protocols in  
7 times of public health crises, as well as Council  
8 member Eugene's resolution calling on DHS to hold all  
9 deportation proceedings for the length of the COVID-  
10 19 pandemic. Through NYFUP, the Bronx Defenders has  
11 represented hundreds of people in deportation cases  
12 both for EOIR and since before the pandemic began,  
13 EOIR struggled to develop and maintain sensible case  
14 management protocols due to policies and practices  
15 that deliberately tip the scales against our clients  
16 and create often insurmountable barriers to  
17 meaningful review of their claims to remain in the  
18 United States. The current crisis has exacerbated  
19 EOIR's pre-existing problems. EOIR's response to the  
20 coronavirus, particularly in New York, has been  
21 chaotic and irresponsible. From the beginning of the  
22 pandemic, advocates, including the Bronx Defenders,  
23 sent a letter to EOIR requesting courts to shut down  
24 immediately. EOIR did not respond. On March 15th,  
25 EOIR partially shut down by halting non-detained

2 master calendar hearing. Still set further trial  
3 dates and non-detained court, many people came to  
4 court, risking their own health and safety, even  
5 though many judges failed to show up without any  
6 notice to the parties. On March 17th, advocates sent  
7 a follow-up letter urging the complete closure of  
8 immigration courts and, on March 18th, non-detained  
9 court shut down nationwide. What has followed is  
10 been an ongoing timeline of fast-changing,  
11 contradictory information about how and where filings  
12 would be accepted, as well as the status of reopening  
13 the non-detained courts. This system sets people up  
14 to fail and failure means deportation. Currently,  
15 EOIR emails the status of reopening non-detained  
16 courts on a weekly basis creating uncertainty and  
17 anxiety for advocates about whether court appearances  
18 will or will not occur due to the limited notice.  
19 Basically, if you are not signed up with EOIR to  
20 receive these notifications by email-- for example,  
21 if you are unrepresented by legal counsel, as is  
22 common with many immigrants facing deportation--  
23 then you are unlikely to know the status of your  
24 court date. And if you don't know whether your court  
25 date is still scheduled and don't show up to the core

2 accordingly, the consequence is deportation. EOIR  
3 must create protocols that take into consideration  
4 the people who they demand to appear in court rather  
5 than decide whether the courts will reopen on a whim  
6 and with minimal notice to parties. Beyond the non-  
7 detained courts, EOIR's detained courts have remained  
8 open during the coronavirus pandemic. Detained cases  
9 in New York have been occurring [inaudible 03:30:29]  
10 with confusing and contradictory messages about which  
11 judges would be available, how Counsel should appear,  
12 and whether filings would be accepted electronically.  
13 Bronx Defenders has joined other organizations and  
14 multiple communications with the court to highlight  
15 the dysfunctional operations and ask for reasonable  
16 accommodations. These requests have been met with  
17 extreme delay or outright denial.

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is up.

19 SOPHIA GURULE: EOIR issued a standing  
20 order for telephonic appearance is applicable to one  
21 immigration judge alone on March 21. In response,  
22 advocates sent another letter to the Barrack Street  
23 immigration court highlighting the deficiencies of  
24 the court and requesting something more  
25 comprehensive. Even ICE prosecutors joined this

2 letter marking unprecedented agreement between the  
3 parties who are traditional and regular adversaries.  
4 However, the court administrators never responded to  
5 this request either. In response-- instead of a  
6 response, they transferred all the cases to Fort  
7 Worth Texas with little information about where to  
8 file documents, how to communicate with clients, and  
9 whether cases would proceed as planned. Attorneys  
10 were often not even called for their cases, even  
11 after filing motions for telephonic appearance and  
12 calling the court themselves. For attorneys who were  
13 able to connect with EOIR in Texas, the cases were  
14 often delayed because they could not find their own  
15 filings or their own case files. While the cases  
16 have now mostly returned to the Barracks Street,  
17 meaningful advocacy of our clients is nearly  
18 impossible due to the barriers related to attorney-  
19 client communication, barriers to gather  
20 documentation for bond and relief from deportation,  
21 and general chaos in detention facilities. Though  
22 telephonic appearances are now the norm, EOIR's  
23 refusal to shut down the detained docket forces  
24 attorneys to represent their clients in impossible  
25 circumstances. For people incarcerated in ICE



2 detention, to bear their most horrific traumas by  
3 video screen without even being able to see their own  
4 attorney in the court room. In light of these  
5 experiences, the Bronx Defenders position is that,  
6 while this crisis continues, all immigration court  
7 should be shut down. All incarcerated people should  
8 be released from ICE detention and all deportations  
9 must come to a halt. No person should be  
10 incarcerated during a global health crisis just to  
11 ensure their appearance at an administrative hearing  
12 and no one person should be deported and separated by  
13 their family. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, Sophia,  
15 for that.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
17 testimony. Next, we will turn to Rebekah Espinoza.  
18 You may begin when you are ready.

19 REBEKAH ESPINOZA: My name is Rebekah  
20 Espinoza and I am a social worker with the  
21 immigration practice with the Bronx Defenders. I  
22 work with individuals with open immigration cases on  
23 issues related to mental health, substance misuse,  
24 trauma, and domestic and community violence. I am  
25 here to talk about resolution number 1399. For

2 immigrant New Yorkers, access to state and local  
3 public benefits means the difference between meeting  
4 basic health and safety needs and experiencing the  
5 trauma of resource deprivation or seeing your  
6 children go to bed hungry. And for many NYC  
7 immigrants, it is a matter of life or death.  
8 Recently, our client, Gabriel, a long time NYC  
9 resident, was arrested by federal immigration  
10 officials when ICE agents came to arrest his roommate  
11 and he drew their attention while translating for  
12 them. He was subsequently detained and ended up  
13 being the first person in the country to test  
14 positive for COVID in ICE detention. Nauseated with  
15 a fever and unable to stop coughing, Gabriel thought  
16 that he was going to die in a jail cell. When  
17 Gabriel was finally released due to the support of  
18 his legal team at the Bronx Defenders, he told me he  
19 felt relieved that he would now be able to get the  
20 medical care that he desperately needs. But it  
21 hasn't worked out that way. It has been months since  
22 Gabriel has returned to his community and he  
23 continues to suffer from shortness of breath. His  
24 chest tightens up and he is unable to walk 10 steps  
25 before feeling dizzy. He is connected to a medical

2 provider, but can't afford medications prescribed to  
3 alleviate his symptoms. He lives every day with an  
4 affliction derived from ICE detention. Additionally,  
5 Gabriel was ineligible to receive assistance for food  
6 and other essential needs. Unable to work and rent a  
7 room of his own, he is currently living couch to  
8 couch and getting by with food pantries when they  
9 have food available. When he found out the city had  
10 funds that would be distributed to the undocumented  
11 community, Gabriel told me he felt hopeful that this  
12 was a sign of better things ahead. But when he heard  
13 about the amount of funds allocated, his tone  
14 changed. With that one time grant of 400 dollars,  
15 Gabriel had to decide whether to buy medicine so he  
16 couldn't breathe or pay his phone bill for his  
17 mandated ICE check ends or try to get food for  
18 himself or financially provide for his younger  
19 daughter. A one-time relief is not enough. I can  
20 also talk to you about Jesse who lost one of her two  
21 jobs due to COVID and every single morning she sorts  
22 out a small amount of food for her five kids, three  
23 of which are noncitizens and therefore ineligible for  
24 benefits. Or about Isaac who traveled 20 minutes on  
25 public transportation at the height of a pandemic all

2 the way to food pantry that had run out of food by  
3 the time he arrived only to return home to an illegal  
4 lockout from his rented room. The exclusion of that  
5 entire population of New Yorkers from critical safety  
6 nets is creating an English that will only continue  
7 to clog an already overbooked system of shelters.  
8 Overburdened healthcare systems and strained support  
9 networks to the point of collapse. The federal  
10 government has deliberately failed all immigrants and  
11 the city has similarly failed to fill in the gaps.  
12 We urge the city Council to pass resolution number  
13 1399 so that every New Yorker, regardless of  
14 immigration status, has access to the basic  
15 necessities that should never have been denied to  
16 them in the first place. Thank you.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
18 testimony. We will now time to Nyasa Hickey. You  
19 may begin when you are ready.

20 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

21 NYASA HICKEY: Hi. My name is Nyasa  
22 Hickey. I am the director of immigration initiatives  
23 at Brooklyn Defender Services, a public defender  
24 office and NYFUP provider. Thank you for this  
25 opportunity to testify today. BDS supports all of

2 the proposed resolutions and, in our written  
3 testimony, we have made some additional notes about  
4 the resolutions. For example, the immigration court  
5 should issue a nationwide standing order on filing  
6 evidence, telephonic hearings, waiver or respondents'  
7 presence, and hold regular stakeholder meeting to  
8 discuss the functioning of the court. As Sophia also  
9 said, went into much more detail about the  
10 immigration court needs. In addition, all ICE  
11 enforcement should be halted nationally and we hope  
12 that the governor of New York State will sign a  
13 Protect Our Courts Act to codify the illegal use of  
14 courts as stalking grounds by ICE. Despite the drop  
15 in detention of new individuals from April until July  
16 2020, BDS NYFUP's team experienced no slowdown in our  
17 work whatsoever. Again, as Sophia highlighted,  
18 individuals were detained and in very dangerous  
19 conditions in immigration detention centers. We  
20 filed enormous numbers of groundbreaking habeas  
21 corpus petitions documenting in great detail that ICE  
22 was holding vulnerable people in conditions that  
23 threatened their life and health. At the end of July  
24 2020, BDS again started to receive calls from  
25 terrified families whose homes had been violently

rated and loved ones who had been kidnapped by ICE in the early hours of the morning. Unbelievably, the immigration jails are once again accepting newly detained immigrants with a complete disregard for the health and safety of individuals in the community.

As we have been throughout the pandemic, NYFUP's staff will continue to fight this unjust and dangerous practice before EOIR and the federal courts. Given the essential role of NYFUP during a crisis with no end in sight, the Council's ongoing support and Chairman Menchaca's ongoing support of our immigration programs and universal access is important. Now more important than ever. We've extensively documented the needs and challenges faced by immigrant clients during COVID in our written testimony. Job loss, housing insecurity, illegal evictions, food and financial insecurity, difficulty accessing medical care and COVID testing, language access and technology barriers are just some of the predominant concerns that were highlighted in our written testimony and also have been highlighted today. We also identified five recommendations in addition to the continued support of NYFUP deportation defense funding. One is to establish an

2 emergency cash assistance fund to provide urgent  
3 financial relief to undocumented workers who have  
4 been disproportionately impacted and excluded from  
5 almost all state and federal relief efforts. Two,  
6 expand food provision and distribution in ways that  
7 ensures accessibility to immigrants who face barriers  
8 such as access to identification, language,  
9 transportation and technology. For example, the food  
10 distribution--

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

12 NYASA HICKEY: through the DOE's  
13 program was very successful and was also very  
14 accessible to our immigrant clients. And I go into  
15 more detail about that in the written testimony.  
16 Three, cancel rent for the duration of the crisis.  
17 If rent is owed after the eviction moratorium is  
18 lifted, landlord harassment and evictions will  
19 skyrocket and immigrant clients will be the most  
20 vulnerable. We've already seen illegal evictions  
21 happening throughout COVID. Four, ensure everyone  
22 has access to comprehensive healthcare regardless of  
23 their immigration status. And, five, increase the  
24 capacity of government workers to help people  
25 understand their benefits and rights over the phone,

2 in multiple languages, and to accommodate for people  
3 who are unable to read or do not have access to a  
4 computer. I'm happy to answer and questions or  
5 highlight some client examples as we've also done in  
6 our written testimony. Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
9 testimony. We will not turn to Michael J. Eatroff.

10 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

11 MICHAEL J. EATROFF: I'm an attorney  
12 with the New York Legal Assistance Group. I would  
13 like to thank the Council and, specifically, the  
14 Committee on Immigration for an opportunity to  
15 testify. I am going to speak today about one of our  
16 clients affected by the Trump administration's  
17 presidential proclamation restricting immigration. U  
18 visas are available to violent crime victims  
19 cooperated with the authorities. Applicants can  
20 include spouses and children under 21 in their  
21 applications, but, once an applicant files for a  
22 green card, these family members lose eligibility.  
23 Where this happens, the applicant can file a new  
24 petition for her family member, but child  
25 beneficiaries of the new petition must enter the



2 United States before turning 21 years old or they  
3 could lose the ability to emigrate for decades. On  
4 April 20th, 2020, after the city had shut down due to  
5 the COVID pandemic, the Trump administration  
6 announced presidential proclamation 10014, since  
7 suspending immigration to the US for most of these the  
8 classes. The administration included the national  
9 interest exception, but it didn't specify the  
10 criteria. At the time the proclamation was  
11 announced, NYLAG was representing Mirna, a domestic  
12 violence victim who had been granted to you visa in  
13 2013 and later a green card. Mirna filed the new  
14 petition on behalf of her child, Isabel, then living  
15 in Mexico. Isabel was also the victim of domestic  
16 violence and years of harassment by her father. The  
17 petition was approved and Isabel then filed an  
18 immigrant visa application. When the proclamation  
19 was announced, the loan remaining step for Isabel was  
20 her visa interview at the consulate. NYLAG and Sen.  
21 Kiersten Jillabrand's office had advocated for an  
22 expedited interview as Isabel's 21st birthday was in  
23 June, but when COVID strap, see had yet to be  
24 scheduled. Then the US consulate suspended regular  
25 visa processing and a proclamation was issued. NYLAG

2 and Mirna joined the lawsuit challenging the  
3 proclamation. In the meantime, Isabel was scheduled  
4 for an emergency visa interview in late May.  
5 Although NYLAG submitted a compelling argument that  
6 is about qualified for a national interest exception,  
7 at her interview, Isabel was not asked any questions  
8 about the exception and was refused a visa. The  
9 litigation team promptly filed for a temporary  
10 restraining order. The government then reversed  
11 course and issued Isabel the visa in order to boot  
12 out a sympathetic plaintiff. Isabel recently  
13 reunited with her mother and sister in the Bronx.  
14 Without the representation by NYLAG, as well as the  
15 litigation team, Mirna and Isabel would still be  
16 separated from each other. Sadly, though, there are  
17 countless other New Yorkers and their family members  
18 now separated from one another because of these cruel  
19 immigration bans that serve no legitimate purpose.  
20 Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
22 testimony. We will now turn to Rex Chen followed by  
23 Hasan Shafiquilah. Rex Chen, you may begin when  
24 you're ready.

25 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

2                   REX CHEN:     My name is Rex Chen and my  
3 pronouns are he and him. I'm the immigration  
4 director at Legal Service NYC. We are the largest  
5 civil legal services provider in the country. In  
6 2008 team, we gave immigration assistance to  
7 households in which over 23,000 people lived. Let me  
8 talk about resolution 1404. It would help everyone  
9 learn what health measures the federal government  
10 will implement for immigration court hearings and the  
11 way we decide whether to hold hearings for people who  
12 are not detained. The resolution says that EOIR  
13 delegates to each local office the power to decide  
14 whether to hold hearings. You know, that might not  
15 be accurate. A court administrator told me this week  
16 that the decision actually comes from EOIR  
17 headquarters. It's really hard to know who is  
18 deciding. Months ago, EOIR told people that it was  
19 the US attorney's office that does psi, but we have  
20 reached out to them and they can't find any  
21 information suggesting that they really have that  
22 power. Legal services NYC even sued EOIR in April  
23 and, in the course of that, we didn't find out who is  
24 making the decisions. The resolution can try to help  
25 us find out who is even making that decision. Let me

2 mention something that is not in that resolution.

3 Resolution 1404 doesn't include any demand that EOIR

4 produce information, data, or staff about the health

5 measures that implements, how well it is going, or

6 how many staff or visitors test positive for COVID.

7 Adding those demands would probably help keep EOIR

8 accountable. I'm going to turn to resolution 1399.

9 The needs of the community are very large. Legal

10 services NYC, led by our great social workers

11 mobilized quickly and creatively as early as March to

12 start raising money for those in need who didn't

13 qualify for public benefits and we even started

14 getting funds to them in April. And we had not been

15 anywhere close to meeting the need, despite the great

16 effort by many. We had our program, MOIA talked

17 about its program. The need is still there. Turning

18 now to resolution 1416. One thing is that there is a

19 concern that talks about the deportation proceedings

20 and we want DHS to stop them. I just want to talk

21 briefly about immigration court hearings. Those are

22 actually run by the Justice Department, not DHS in

23 the Executive Office for Immigration Review. If the

24 resolution leads the government in the Justice

25 Department to stop deportation proceedings, meaning

2 stop all immigration court hearings, I just want to  
3 point out that that might hurt some immigrants who  
4 actually are really eager to get in immigration court  
5 hearing as soon as possible. There are some  
6 protections that you can only get in immigration  
7 court and, first people, it is critical to get that  
8 hearing now. For example, if you want to get  
9 something called cancellation of removal for those  
10 who don't have status, you need to show exceptional  
11 hardship to a qualifying relative and you want a  
12 decision before your child turns 21. Something that  
13 could be clarified is that you can still allow those  
14 who demand a hearing to get it, even while stopping  
15 these deportations. Thank you.

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

19 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

20 HASAN SHAFIQUILAH: Good afternoon and  
21 thank you to Council member Menchaca and all the  
22 Council member for convening this hearing. My name  
23 Hasan Shafiquilah. I'm the attorney in charge of the  
24 immigration law unit at the Legal Aid Society. Legal  
25 Aid, like all of the partner agencies in this hearing

2 have been on the front lines of responding to the  
3 pandemic. We've lost clients to COVID. We have  
4 staff who have been sick and are doing our best in  
5 the midst of difficult circumstances. Together, with  
6 our partner agencies in NYIFUP, the New York  
7 Immigrant Family Unity Project, and Brooklyn and  
8 Bronx Defenders, we have been fighting to get people  
9 out of COVID-infested jails in the midst of the  
10 pandemic where ICE is refusing, in most cases, to  
11 voluntarily release our clients. And so, together,  
12 through the mix of ABS petitions and send federal  
13 court, on to hearings in immigration court and, in  
14 rare instances, convincing ICE to exercise its  
15 discretion and grant humanitarian parole, we have  
16 secure the release of many medically vulnerable  
17 individuals, but a lot of our clients are still  
18 anguishing in detention and it is alarming that I see  
19 is starting up its enforcement activities and putting  
20 people into jails when they really should be  
21 releasing everybody because civil immigration  
22 enforcement should not come with the threat of a  
23 death sentence. Like all of us, we had been fighting  
24 on the half of our clients who are on the non-  
25 detained docket, even though hearings are suspended

2 at the moment. Deadlines have not been told and so,  
3 we are continuing to fight and respond to requests  
4 for evidence and tried to get documents from agencies  
5 that may be closed and we're trying to explain that  
6 it's, in some cases, impossible to give to the court  
7 or USCIS the documents that they're requiring. Or  
8 like with USCIS sending our clients in to get medical  
9 exams in response to requests for evidence for their  
10 adjustments, even though going into a doctor's office  
11 could be putting them at risk. So, I think those are  
12 similar to what all of the agencies are doing. I  
13 just want to highlight one thing not legal aid has  
14 been doing with our law forum unit which is fighting  
15 against the public charge roles. We had gotten a  
16 nationwide injunction which was then stayed by the  
17 Supreme Court and then, during COVID, we got a  
18 nationwide COVID-related injunction barring the  
19 Homeland security public charge role from going into  
20 effect because the pandemic is not the time to scare  
21 people away from getting lifesaving health care and  
22 other benefits that they need. That, unfortunately,  
23 was just enjoined by the Second Circuit, but we are  
24 continuing to litigate that at the District Court and  
25 at the Second Circuit and preparing to defend an

2 appeal to the Supreme Court on that. Both the  
3 Homeland security rule and the Department of State  
4 rule. In terms of all the resolutions that are  
5 currently under consideration, we whole heartedly  
6 endorse all of them. Just a not about resolution  
7 1399, props to the city Council for backing this one  
8 in particular. It helps counteract some of the  
9 horrible language in the 1996 welfare reform law that  
10 Clinton signed into--

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

12 HASAN SHAFIQUILAH: law. And opens the  
13 door to welfare benefits for non-citizens. Thank  
14 you.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
16 testimony. I'm not seeing any Council member  
17 questions. We will be moving on to the next panel.  
18 I now would like to welcome Ravi Reddi to testify.  
19 After Ravi, we would be hearing from Hallie Yee,  
20 Shaaranya Pilai, Jeehae Fischer and then Frances  
21 Huang. Robbie, you may begin when you are ready.

22 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

23 RAVI REDDI: My name is Ravi Reddi and I  
24 am the associate director for advocacy and policy at  
25 the Asian American Federation. I want to thank the



2 committee to give me the opportunity to testify  
3 today. Overall, Asians make up 16 percent of the  
4 city's population, approximately seven in 10 were  
5 born abroad and about one in five Asian immigrants  
6 may be undocumented in New York City. As  
7 Commissioner Mostofi and numerous council members  
8 have acknowledged, the COVID-19 pandemic has created  
9 an unprecedented crisis for all Asian New Yorkers  
10 midst a 35 percent increase in deaths over the five-  
11 year average in a 6000 percent increase in  
12 unemployment claims compared to this time last year.  
13 But this crisis has slowed down this administration's  
14 effort to hurt our most vulnerable populations at the  
15 exact moment when they need access to government  
16 services and are working on the frontline themselves.  
17 Days ago, and injunction we and our partners one that  
18 would have stopped the application of the Trump  
19 administration's cruel public charge rule during the  
20 COVID-19 pandemic was stayed. But let's call this  
21 rule what it is. An attempt to erode the family-  
22 based immigration system that brought generations of  
23 Asian families to the United States and, despite this  
24 rules limited scope, many families are nonetheless  
25 decided rolling out of fear. And COVID-19 hasn't

2 stopped ICE from continuing detainment that will  
3 likely pick up once New York City reopens. While our  
4 immigrant community works on the front lines for the  
5 rest of us, they deserve access to quality and  
6 language legal services in pursuit of all available  
7 options to remain in the country. Citywide language  
8 access efforts are critical to help our most  
9 vulnerable. Asian small business owners, 88 percent  
10 of whom are immigrants, are facing immediate  
11 difficult decisions regarding store closure and  
12 bankruptcy and Asian seniors, isolated by the  
13 pandemic, are utilizing services that reflect their  
14 values and ethnic identities. As committee Chair  
15 Menchaca mentioned, they are community organizations,  
16 instead of the city. So, here is what we are asking  
17 of the committee. The city must actively communicate  
18 with current and past benefit recipients, regardless  
19 of citizenship status that federal rule changes to  
20 not impact eligibility for benefits. The city can do  
21 a better job of encouraging eligible beneficiaries to  
22 maintain their access to services and to do it in  
23 language. Aside from sanctuary policies to curb  
24 excessive ICE enforcement, additional investment is  
25 also needed to help grow capacity for immigrants

2 serving community organizations providing in language  
3 legal services alongside Know Your Rights and urgency  
4 response training for front-line workers. As several  
5 Council members acknowledged, the city must better  
6 address the desperate need for timely language access  
7 by New Yorkers seeking services from their  
8 government. This can be done by providing better  
9 funding and support for CBO's who are already  
10 familiar with the matter, have community buy-in, and  
11 are asked to provide translations or create a  
12 mechanism for central uniform translation by city  
13 agencies. We believe in the work we have also been  
14 doing over the past three years alongside several  
15 other CBO's to create a language bank to expand  
16 translation services for as many immigrant  
17 communities as possible and we ask the Council to  
18 find ways to support this effort. Underfunded CBO's  
19 need--

20 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

21 RAVI REDDI: delivering services rather  
22 than creating translations unless better funding can  
23 allow them to do both. With that, on behalf of the  
24 AAF, I want to thank you for engaging us on the  
25 important immigration work before the city Council.

2 The Asian American Federation will always stand with  
3 our immigrant community and we look forward to  
4 engaging individual Council members and this  
5 committee on how we can address the needs of  
6 immigrants in every district and across the city.  
7 Thank you.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
9 testimony. Now, I'd like to call on Hallie Yee. You  
10 may begin when you are ready.

11 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

12 HALLIE YEE: Thank you. My name is Hallie  
13 Yee and I am a policy coordinator at the Coalition  
14 for Asian American Children and Families, or CACF. I  
15 want to thank Chair Menchaca and members of the  
16 committee on immigration for giving us the  
17 opportunity to testify. CACF speaks on behalf of our  
18 highly immigrant APA communities today who have been  
19 left behind in the city's COVID response and must be  
20 centered in the discussion of revitalization as they  
21 face greater challenges and lost due to this  
22 pandemic. I will go into a lot of the statistics  
23 because Ravi did a great job prior to me, but  
24 especially with the public charge rules chilling  
25 effect that is already been a reason for

2 disenrollment and general lack of enrollment in  
3 public benefits, our immigrant New Yorkers need  
4 access to state and city benefits regardless of their  
5 status to ensure health and safety New York for all.  
6 Because of this, on behalf of our 70+ organizational  
7 members and partners serving a diverse Asian Pacific  
8 American communities across New York City, we support  
9 each of the resolutions being proposed today with  
10 special attention to Chair Menchaca's. Immigrant New  
11 Yorkers have been at the forefront of the state's  
12 fight against COVID-19 representing one third of the  
13 state's essential workers and playing a key role in  
14 all sectors of our battle against the pandemic from  
15 food production and delivery to construction and  
16 frontline health care provision. This ongoing  
17 exposure has contributed to the disparate outcomes  
18 and COVID-19 infection and death which have  
19 disproportionately afflicted immigrant communities of  
20 color. The connection is clear. By failing to  
21 provide meaningful, ongoing access to affordable  
22 health services, the state is exacerbating COVID-19.  
23 The pandemic presents a grim opportunity to see the  
24 life-and-death consequences of this action. The  
25 solution presented here today offer an opportunity

2 for New York State to seize the moment and take a  
3 step towards equity in healthcare and in legal  
4 services for the communities suffering most acutely  
5 from this crisis by temporarily ensuring access to  
6 affordable health insurance and more. Furthermore,  
7 for our city to continue phases of reopening, we have  
8 to think of more than three percent citywide average  
9 transmission rate threshold that the city is focused  
10 on. As I'm sure Chair Menchaca is aware, Sunset  
11 Park, for instance, has had many-- has had a very  
12 significant spike and having no tracking of  
13 disproportionality like that is detrimental in the  
14 long run. We are asking city Council today to hold  
15 our public health systems accountable to our  
16 community's needs. We demand the city provide  
17 accurate data collection and disaggregation of data  
18 on infection rates, hospitalization, and deaths in  
19 the APA community. Disaggregated by race and  
20 ethnicity. Second, we demand that the city's health  
21 system in partnership with schools ensures that the  
22 critical information gets to families in the  
23 languages that they need. And, third, we address the  
24 city address the mental health of our children and  
25 families, especially those who are East Asian

2 presenting who have been targeted during this  
3 pandemic. Our communities are consistently  
4 overlooked in the distribution of resources and this  
5 pandemic has highlighted a myriad of--

6 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

7 HALLIE YEE: [inaudible 03:7:12] city  
8 safety net systems and the city's response must  
9 address root problems in addition to immediate needs.  
10 Our community will continue to suffer every day we  
11 allow these flaws in the system to exist. As always,  
12 CACF will continue to be available as a resource and  
13 partner to address these concerns and look forward to  
14 working with the city to better address the  
15 inequities we see day and in day out within our  
16 entities.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, Hallie.

18 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
19 testimony. Next, we will hear from Shaaranya Pilai.

20 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

21 SHAARANYA PILAI: Thank you. I thank  
22 Chair Carlos Menchaca and the Committee on  
23 Immigration for helping India Home provide for the  
24 South Asian community and helping my fellow panel  
25 members such difficult times. My name is Shaaranya

2 Pilai. I am deputy director at Indian Home. The  
3 mission of India Home is to improve the quality of  
4 life for older adults by providing culturally  
5 appropriate social services. India Home addresses  
6 the growing needs of senior center services which  
7 include congregant meal programs, case management,  
8 health and wellness programs, creative aging  
9 programs, and various one-on-one services. During  
10 this pandemic, India Home quickly responded to the  
11 needs of the South Asian senior community and has  
12 continued to serve an even higher number of clients  
13 than ever before. We have been tirelessly working to  
14 make sure the immigrant community gets accurate  
15 information, resources and language through our  
16 individual wellness checkup calls. We have  
17 prioritized food security and quickly started a  
18 culturally competent home delivered meal and grocery  
19 program which serves meals to 111 seniors three days  
20 a week and have serves close to over 800 seniors  
21 today. Our dedication to reducing social isolation  
22 and promoting health and wellness continues as we  
23 have transitioned to virtual senior programs,  
24 including informational lectures, yoga, meditation,  
25 and creative aging. We have also continued to



2 provide case management, health and reassurance,  
3 counseling, ESL, citizenship classes, among other  
4 programs which are much-needed during this time.

5 Despite dire circumstances and budget cuts, we have

6 worked hard to provide these services to the South

7 Asian community during the pandemic. We have seen

8 firsthand a lot of the struggles our community has

9 faced. Our seniors are low to no income, low English

10 proficient, and phase dire food security, especially

11 during this pandemic which further exacerbated their

12 vulnerability as older adults, as people of color,

13 and as immigrants. Many of our clients have

14 expressed that they are worried and fearful about

15 their immigration status and reluctant to get tested

16 for COVID-19 because of this. Many of our seniors

17 depend on family members who lost their jobs at

18 overwhelmingly high rate and, due to their

19 immigration status, they are not eligible for

20 government benefits, unemployment insurance benefits,

21 and were not eligible for the federal stimulus check,

22 either. Even for those applying for citizenship who

23 could have become eligible, the pandemic put their

24 citizenship application process on halt.

25 Furthermore, despite these dire circumstances, the

2 ICE raids continue to happen and inhumane deportation  
3 continue to take place which resulted in complete  
4 disruptions of family units and upheavals of our  
5 community. Given these vulnerabilities that the  
6 immigrant community is currently facing, we need the  
7 city's help to protect and include immigrants in its  
8 COVID-19 response. India Home makes the following  
9 recommendations to pass the resolutions proposed  
10 today by the Chair and to further emphasize halt all  
11 deportation proceedings for the length of the COVID-  
12 19 pandemic, provide relief for those in the  
13 immigrant community on employment-based status who  
14 lost their jobs and their dependent family members  
15 and support immigrants serving grassroots  
16 organizations as Chair Menchaca emphasized earlier  
17 today. Immigrant communities are coming to CBO's as  
18 a first point of contact for all of their issues.  
19 And please do continue to--

20 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

21 SHAARANYA PILAI: [inaudible 04:00:49]

22 such as ours to better serve the vulnerable immigrant  
23 aging community with crucial resources. Thank you  
24 and we hope we have your support to stabilize our  
25 community. Thanks.

2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you,  
3 Shaaranya.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
5 testimony. Next, we will hear from Jeehae Fischer.  
6 You may begin when you are ready.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

8 JEEHAE FISCHER: I would like to thank  
9 the city Council and the Committee on Immigration for  
10 the opportunity to testify. My name is Jeehae  
11 Fischer and I am the executive director of the  
12 Korean-American Family Service Center. KFSC provides  
13 social services to the immigrant survivors and their  
14 children. All of our programs and services are  
15 offered in a culturally and linguistically  
16 appropriate setting. Our immigrant survivors are  
17 impacted and further traumatized by policies and  
18 responses that excluded them from emergency relief  
19 efforts. Many of our survivors are undocumented and  
20 are excluded from accessing unemployment insurance  
21 and all other income support. They lost financial  
22 means. Some temporarily, others permanently,  
23 resulting in loss of livelihood and unable to support  
24 themselves and their children. These consequences  
25 are exacerbated as they are not eligible for

2 unemployment benefits and other labor protections by  
3 law from which they are excluded. Many in our  
4 community and their loved one have contracted the  
5 virus and passed away. Without financial means, our  
6 immigrant survivors can't afford food, rent, basic  
7 necessities, personal protective equipment, and  
8 supplies, medical care, or basic living expenses.  
9 Phone, Internet, utility bills. I would like to  
10 share one of our client's stories. Ms. M  
11 successfully graduated from our long-term  
12 transitional housing program last December after  
13 escaping an abusive relationship. With KFSC's  
14 support, she secured permanent housing and a job as a  
15 mail technician. She felt empowered to lead an  
16 independent life and raise her nine-year-old son as a  
17 single mom. However, the recent COVID-19 pandemic  
18 changed her life upside down. Unemployed, distressed  
19 by her financial hardship, she felt hopeless and  
20 constantly worried for her and her son's future. As  
21 an immigrant with of permanent residency, she is free  
22 to apply for public benefits that are available due  
23 to public charge. She called KFSC's 24 hour hotline  
24 to seek support. We were able to provide her and her  
25 child with food, financial subsidy, as well as other

2 basic necessities temporarily. This is one of many  
3 daunting stories we are encountering daily. And KFSC  
4 continues to ensure support for clients like Ms. M  
5 during this unprecedented time. KFSC saw a 300  
6 percent increase in call volume on our 24 hour  
7 hotline. 80 percent were related to domestic  
8 violence, sexual assault, and child abuse. The  
9 remaining were all COVID-19 related. Callers would  
10 ask if we had food to donate or to simply say I am so  
11 hungry and ask for information, COVID-19 related  
12 information. We--

13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

14 JEEHAE FISCHER: urgently ask our Council  
15 members and Committee on Immigration to take  
16 proactive measures to support the immigrant community  
17 and make immediate changes to ensure that the  
18 immigrant New Yorkers that are the heart be of this  
19 city are fully included in COVID-19 response efforts.  
20 Thank you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
22 testimony. Next, we will hear from Frances Huang.

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time--

24 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: You may begin when  
25 you are ready.

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will  
3 begin now.

4 FRANCES HUANG: Thank you, Chair  
5 Menchaca, and members of the city Council for the  
6 opportunity to testify today. My name is Frances  
7 Huang. I use they/them pronouns and I and the policy  
8 associate at Chinese-American planning Council or  
9 CPC. CPC's mission is to promote social and economic  
10 empowerment of Chinese-American emigrant and low  
11 income communities. CPC is the largest Asian  
12 American social services organization in the US and  
13 we provide vital resources from more than 60,000  
14 people per year through more than 50 programs at 30  
15 sites across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. CPC  
16 employees over 700 staff whose comprehensive services  
17 are linguistically accessible, culturally sensitive,  
18 and highly effective in reaching low income and  
19 immigrant individual families. Today, CPC is calling  
20 on the city Council to not only treat health care as  
21 a right, but also intentionally allocate money to  
22 build more comprehensive infrastructure for  
23 healthcare that funds immigrant and a API health care  
24 services equitably. What we are seeing is that AAPI,  
25 they make up, as folks were saying before, 15 to 16

2 percent of New York City's population, yet receive  
3 less than four percent of the city's funding. In  
4 this health care system, we see that this translates  
5 to a lack of medical staff that represent and  
6 understand our community members, a lack of training  
7 to support recent immigrants as they navigate through  
8 the healthcare system, and a lack of cultural  
9 humility in every single level of the medical  
10 infrastructure. The lack of disaggregated data also  
11 ends up obscuring the different health outcomes and  
12 needs experienced by different Asian groups in New  
13 York today. Health and financial data, they vary  
14 across different ethnic groups and they are very  
15 different approaches to health care services. For  
16 example, up to 17 percent of Koreans in New York are  
17 uninsured compared to 11 percent of Chinese  
18 immigrants and South Asian New Yorkers are at a  
19 higher risk for diabetes and hypertension compared to  
20 Chinese New Yorkers. And what we have also seen is  
21 that, due to the expansion of the public charge rule  
22 and the list of the public charge injunction, we have  
23 heard cases of H&H workers asking our community  
24 members to apply for Medicaid first, regardless of  
25 immigration status, which then deters undocumented

2 community members from either applying to Medicaid or  
3 returning to H&H at all because of public charge  
4 concerns. And we have seen that especially during  
5 the chilling effect. Many of our community members  
6 are already calling us to ask if they can disenroll  
7 from their benefits due to public charge. And, of  
8 course, COVID-19 has exacerbated all of this  
9 situation, leaving many immigrants to choose between  
10 their health and paying for rent and food. To combat  
11 the COVID-19 pandemic, CPC, we have been providing  
12 free meal distribution weekly--

13 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is up.

14 FRANCES HUANG: to the lower East side  
15 in Brooklyn and, even though our staff are working  
16 tirelessly to provide food, it is not enough. There  
17 are reports of groceries rotting. Culturally  
18 appropriate foods are rarely available and, if they  
19 are, it's the same dish every week and the lines are  
20 wrapping around the block. [Inaudible 04:08:22]  
21 senior center in Flushing, the seniors are on a  
22 rotation system due to overwhelming demand, meaning  
23 they receive a free meal maybe once every 3 to 4  
24 weeks. So, what we are seeing is that there is a  
25 high demand for food and undocumented and low income



2 immigrants are left out of the COVID-19 response on,  
3 as well as our staff are over capacity and be calm  
4 the interpretation and cultural navigators for all  
5 types of services. So, thank you, again, today, to  
6 the Immigration Committee and to Chair Menchaca for  
7 letting us testify. And I am open to any questions.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, Frances.  
9 And I just want to say one thing. Thank you for the  
10 work. You are an example of a partnership with our  
11 office. Grow NYC and you all were trying to our best  
12 to support the food piece. I know there is somebody  
13 else and probably the next panel, Whitney, who is  
14 connected to the South Brooklyn Mutual Aid work and  
15 all I want to say is that the administration  
16 testified to the cultural responsive food and the  
17 commitment to that. And so, I want to make sure that  
18 we follow up with them. And one question I have  
19 right now is there an MOIA representative on this  
20 call? On this zoom still? I just want to make sure  
21 you are here. I don't know how we do that, exactly,  
22 but, if there is a raising hand function, I just want  
23 to make sure that there is a-- Martin Kim. Okay. I  
24 think that-- Is that the Mayor's Office person?  
25 Okay. Great. So, we do have a Mayor's Office

2 person. Let's just make sure that these are the  
3 kinds of things that we are going to follow up on.  
4 So, thank you for your testimony.

5 FRANCES HUANG: Thank you.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
7 testimony. I'm not seeing any other Council member  
8 questions, so we will move on to our next panel. I  
9 would like to now welcome Andrew Ochoa to testify.  
10 After Andrew Ochoa, we will have Zachary Ahmed, José  
11 Chapa, Carina Kaufman Gutierrez, Whitney Hu, and then  
12 Sarah Elsebai. Andrew Ochoa, you may begin when you  
13 are ready.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will  
15 begin.

16 ANDREW OCHOA: Good afternoon. My name  
17 is Andrew Ochoa and I am program coordinator with  
18 Hispanic Federation. I would like to thank Chair  
19 Menchaca and all committee members for bringing us  
20 together today to discuss the COVID-19 response and  
21 how it pertains to our immigrant community. From  
22 barriers to accessing healthcare, job and income  
23 loss, and food and housing and security, immigrant  
24 New Yorkers remain the most vulnerable and the least  
25 protected to the effects of these pandemic, while

1 serving on the front lines as essential workers. And  
2 the face of these unprecedented challenges, Hispanic  
3 Federation has committed over 13 million dollars  
4 through our COVID-19 relief fund to directly address  
5 these concerns. However, significant need remains in  
6 our community. Federal initiatives have largely  
7 excluded immigrants, particularly the undocumented,  
8 from receiving much-needed aid. While local city  
9 funding efforts are a positive step to addressing  
10 inequities, much work is needed to adequately meet  
11 the overwhelming challenges faced by our immigrant  
12 New Yorkers. Based on our daily work in  
13 conversations with immigrant community members who  
14 continue to express high-end fear, dire need, and a  
15 lack of available information, our recommendations  
16 are the following. Expanding the commitment of city  
17 funding towards emergency cash assistance programs,  
18 ideally upfront funding, as noted from Alba from  
19 NMCIR. Strengthening culturally and linguistically  
20 responsive contact tracing, increasing multilingual  
21 outreach, empowering uninsured immigrants to access  
22 free coronavirus testing, and as Manny from NICE  
23 highlighted, we recommend ensuring the promotion of  
24 mental health services to all New Yorkers, regardless  
25

2 of immigration status, as well as prioritizing  
3 cultural competence training to help mitigate the  
4 increased mortality rate of immigrants and people of  
5 color. In addition to emphasizing multilingual  
6 outreach, regarding New York City tenant and eviction  
7 protections, we also support continued expansion of  
8 food pantries, all city feeding programs, and  
9 increasing food allowances for all emergency housing  
10 programs. Thank you for your time. Hispanic  
11 Federation is here to serve and is happy to work with  
12 the New York City Council to protect immigrant New  
13 Yorkers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

17 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will  
18 begin.

19 ZACHARY AHMED: Thank you. My name is  
20 Zachary Ahmed and I am a policy counsel at the New  
21 York Civil Liberties Union. I want to thank the  
22 committee for holding this hearing and for the  
23 opportunity to testify. The federal government's  
24 response to COVID-19 has been a failure of leadership  
25 on multiple levels and the way in which immigrants

2 have been neglected and mistreated and not response  
3 has been shameful. As we all know, immigrants make  
4 up a large proportion of what many call essential  
5 workers, risking their lives each day to provide  
6 others with the necessary services, yet many have  
7 been left out of the relief package is passed by  
8 Congress for reasons related to their immigration  
9 status. At the same time, the Trump administration  
10 has continued to aggressively pursue an anti-  
11 immigrant agenda, conducting raids, continuing to  
12 detain people, and transfer them across the country  
13 and creating an overall atmosphere of fear that grips  
14 many immigrant communities. So, we commend the city  
15 Council and the Immigration Committee for using its  
16 voice to call attention to this situation and, with  
17 the resolutions on today's agenda, urged the federal  
18 government to take action and the state to open up  
19 new avenues. In particular, we joined the call for  
20 state legislature to pass and the governor designed  
21 assembly Bill 10433 in Senate Bill 5167 which would  
22 remove any legal barrier that might restrict the  
23 city's ability to offer its own relief to its  
24 emigrant residents who have been left out of federal  
25 measures and create new opportunities for local

2 action. We also welcome what it is substantially  
3 outlined and several resolutions calling for federal  
4 action, including halting the deportation process and  
5 providing stability for people with employment-based  
6 status. Yet, we also recognize that the measures  
7 outlined here represent a minimum of what the federal  
8 government can and should do in this moment. And so,  
9 I want to lift up a few additional measures that the  
10 Council should and could use its influence to advance  
11 at the federal level. First, Congress needs to  
12 ensure that all COVID testing and treatment is  
13 covered by emergency Medicaid. The COVID relief  
14 package is passed by Congress to date have largely  
15 left in place immigrant eligibility restrictions that  
16 affect millions, including DACA and TBS recipients.  
17 And while New York has taken measures to expand  
18 coverage for testing and treatment access under our  
19 state emergency Medicaid, it is imperative that  
20 Congress also take action and to eliminate any  
21 confusion, ensure continuity and make sure that any  
22 gaps are filled. Second, cash assistance, through  
23 tax rebates like those that many received earlier  
24 this year must be made available to all taxpayers.  
25 Under prior legislation, only those with Social

2 Security numbers were eligible to receive release,  
3 leaving out many people, including many essential  
4 workers who file their taxes is a and I-10, as well  
5 as many joint filers. That needs to be expanded.  
6 Third, Congress must pass legislation to mandate  
7 automatic renewals of work authorization for  
8 nonimmigrant visa holders and DACA and TBS  
9 recipients. Many work authorized people nearing  
10 their renewal dates are at risk of having their  
11 authorization lapsed due to backlogs at USCIS and the  
12 continuing looming threat of furloughs. Automatic  
13 extensions would ease the burden for thousands of  
14 families. Finally, and of critical importance, all  
15 ICE enforcement actions must be halted as long as the  
16 COVID-19 pandemic persists and people in ICE  
17 detention must be released.

18 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is up.

19 ZACHARY AHMED: Halting the deportation  
20 process is one important measure, but that must go  
21 hand in hand with an end to raids and a disruption of  
22 the immigration detention system that already detains  
23 thousands, causing the public health catastrophe. So  
24 we encourage the Council to use the voice and  
25

2 influence to continue pushing for these and other  
3 federal actions. Thank you for the committee's time.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
5 testimony. Next, we will be calling on Whitney Hu  
6 followed by Jose Chapa, followed by Carina Kaufman  
7 Gutierrez. Whitney Hu?

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

9 WHITNEY HU: Hi. My name is Whitney Hu  
10 and I am one of the founders and organizer of South  
11 Brooklyn Mutual Aid. We are a group that started  
12 right after the pandemic and we serve primarily  
13 undocumented immigrants across Sunset Park, Bay  
14 Ridge, and Benson Hurst. I'm appreciative of the  
15 Counsel for making space for this and for Chair  
16 Menchaca for inviting us to testify. I am not going  
17 to live. My review of the city's response to food,  
18 especially for those within our communities was  
19 atrocious. It was negligence. It was, if anything,  
20 cruel. We were seeing, at the peak of the pandemic,  
21 hundreds of families requesting and asking for food,  
22 asking for diapers because what they found of the  
23 city's meals and system was incredibly hard to  
24 understand, hard to navigate or were often cold meals  
25 and that is not enough to help a baby from not crying



2 at night. We had mothers calling us asking to set up  
3 payments to pay for their children. We had seniors  
4 asking for better food than applesauce and chips and  
5 it is six months later and I have not the food  
6 increase or change. If anything, I have, instead,  
7 see in the food that are do a lot of photo ops with  
8 electives and different communities instead of  
9 actually reaching out to those on the ground. I work  
10 with a lot of mutual aids across the city and we have  
11 still not seen actual direct outreach from the city.  
12 Instead, what we are seeing is neoliberalism where we  
13 are expected to serve and continue to work while the  
14 government and private partners are able to make  
15 money into a smile and feel good and that is  
16 unacceptable. While we are serving and need in  
17 crisis, we should not be the end-all result. We are  
18 also no working with churches and organizations,  
19 including those like Worker Justice Project, Chinese-  
20 American Planning Council, to continue to try to  
21 fight and serve those on the ground. This also  
22 extends over the schools. We adjusted a back-to-  
23 school program and we had more parents show up with  
24 iPads, uncertain about how it actually access or get  
25 them ready to get their children on. Rent, jobs,

2 these are all things that I feel like our continually  
3 ignored as the city focuses more about reopening.  
4 From the perspective of what we are seeing on the  
5 ground, things aren't changing just because we have  
6 reopened up some restaurants and some businesses. We  
7 are still seeing numbers increase in, right now, we  
8 are even seeing white families show up as  
9 unemployment has gone out. There is a church in  
10 South Brooklyn that is seeing sometimes 100 families  
11 a day and, while he is reached out to the Council and  
12 to others, he hasn't seen any actual long-term food  
13 support. I think, from what we're seeing right now,  
14 is this idea of recovery seems really silly when we  
15 are still in crisis. Thank you so much.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, Whitney.

17 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
18 testimony. Next, we will hear from José Chapa. You  
19 may begin when you are ready.

20 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will  
21 begin now.

22 JOSE CHAPA: Thank you. Good afternoon.  
23 They get a Council member Menchaca and the Committee  
24 on Immigration on holding this public hearing to  
25 address the urgent need to ensure that our response

2 to COVID-19 includes everyone, especially those who  
3 have been significantly impacted. My name is José  
4 Chapa and I am the senior policy associate at the  
5 Immigrant Defense Project. IDP is an organization  
6 that works to secure fairness and justice for  
7 immigrants across the United States. We help lay the  
8 groundwork for a day when the criminal on immigration  
9 laws of the United States respect and uphold the  
10 human rights of everyone. We speak today in support  
11 of the resolutions that seek to address the harms of  
12 the exclusionary immigration policies and ICE  
13 policing in deportation practices that have further  
14 marginalized immigrant community members during a  
15 global pandemic. We also want to bring attention to  
16 two state bills that are related to immigrant  
17 communities and COVID-19 that boast past the New York  
18 State Legislature this session and are awaiting the  
19 governor's signature. The Protect Our Courts Act,  
20 Senate Bill 425, and the Contact Tracing  
21 Confidentiality Act, Senate Bill 8450. In April 2019,  
22 the Committee passed resolution number 828 and  
23 calling for the New York State Legislature to pass in  
24 the governor to assign the Protect Our Courts Act.  
25 Given that the courts have begun to reopen, it is

2 critical that the governor signs the bill into law to  
3 ensure that everyone has equal access and protections  
4 from courts. Not only have undocumented immigrants  
5 been excluded from economic relief, they are further  
6 marginalized from accessing rights and remedies such  
7 as due process rights, orders of protection, and  
8 fighting eviction. Available through the court  
9 system where ICE targets people for arrests. ICE's  
10 practices during the pandemic continued raids while  
11 COVID-19 was ravaging communities across the state,  
12 refusing to release people in detention and deporting  
13 people with COVID makes crystal clear that ICE has  
14 little regard for human health and safety. On  
15 September 1, ICE announced that it had conducted a  
16 national operation arresting more than 2000 people,  
17 83 of them in New York City. New York has been in  
18 ICE's crosshairs for years and it's targeting of our  
19 state increased dramatically in the months leading up  
20 to the current shutdown. Notably, ICE operations  
21 increased 400 percent in New York in the first 11  
22 weeks of 2020 as compared to the last four weeks of  
23 the previous year, only to be slowed down by COVID-  
24 19. ICE's aggressive targeting of New Yorkers also  
25 high ends the urgency for the governor to sign the

2 Contact Tracing Confidentiality Bill which states  
3 that emergency-- states of emergency have  
4 historically provided a ripe opportunity for  
5 governments and police to expand their surveillance  
6 powers over whoever is considered to be a threat,  
7 most recently black and brown communities, including  
8 immigrants. And it is critical that New York State  
9 does not allow management of the pandemic to expand  
10 the surveillance state. By passing this law, the  
11 governor will ensure that information provided  
12 through contact tracing cannot be weaponized by the  
13 NYPD, ICE, or other policing agencies. We bear  
14 witness to the devastation immigrant communities have  
15 endured because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Immigrant  
16 neighborhoods have been at the epicenter of the  
17 outbreak and experienced massive loss of life and  
18 instability. Brooklyn, along with Queens and the  
19 Bronx and, in particular, the immigrant  
20 neighborhoods--

21 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time is up.

22 JOSÉ CHAPA: have been among the worst hit  
23 the hardest by COVID-19 in the country. We will not  
24 forget that there were freezer trucks lined up in the  
25 parking lots, including in Sunset Park serving as

2 makeshift morgues. Many of our constituents reached  
3 out to you asking you to take care of sick loved ones  
4 because they are trying to put food on the table.  
5 Thankfully, the legislature has been presented with a  
6 clear solution. We are urging you to call on the  
7 governor to sign the Protect Our Courts Act and  
8 Contract Tracing Confidentiality Bill. I will submit  
9 the rest of this through email. Thank you so much.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you, José.

11 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
12 testimony. Next, we will hear from Carina Kaufman  
13 Gutierrez. You may begin when you are ready.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will  
15 begin now.

16 CARINA KAUFMAN GUTIERREZ: Thank you.

17 Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you, Council member  
18 Menchaca and said the Committee on Immigration for  
19 your time today and holding this important hearing.  
20 My name is Carina Kaufman Gutierrez and I am the  
21 Deputy Director of the Street Vendor Project of the  
22 Urban Justice Center. There are approximately 20,000  
23 New Yorkers who sell food and merchandise from the  
24 streets and sidewalks of New York City. 90 percent  
25 of the Street Vendor Project members are low-wage

2 immigrant workers who rely on busy streets in order  
3 to survive and are reporting income losses of 70 to  
4 90 percent and, in fact, are still being heavily  
5 fined for minor violations. Two of our members in  
6 lower Manhattan received finds of up to 500 dollars  
7 this week from the NYPD and the Department of Health.  
8 One for not having their license showing rate here  
9 and one for having a box outside of their food cart  
10 and one for being too close to the sidewalk. Street  
11 vendors have been excluded from disaster relief at  
12 every level of government and our members Nabil and  
13 Hassan have no idea how they are going to pay these  
14 finds when they make three dollars for each plate  
15 that they serve and that needs to go to rent first.  
16 We ask for city Council to prioritize the recovery of  
17 immigrant owned small businesses that make our city  
18 great. Small business owners and workers, annually,  
19 street vendors contribute about 293 million dollars  
20 to the city's economy, yet, city, state, and federal  
21 government sponsored relief programs have excluded  
22 informal businesses like street vendors due to  
23 rigorous technological and documentation  
24 requirements. But, perhaps, the biggest barrier is  
25 the lack of a social security number. A significant

2 number of street vendors are undocumented, which  
3 means they don't even qualify for unemployment  
4 benefits, despite collecting and paying sales tax  
5 just like any other business. New York City  
6 immigrant owned small businesses comprise 48 percent  
7 of our cities roughly 220,000 small businesses. The  
8 short term solution that is needed for the current  
9 financial hardship that street vendors are facing is  
10 an immediate response from the city creating granting  
11 programs that suit street vendors as sole proprietors  
12 of their businesses, regardless of their immigration  
13 status. And the long term solution for vending is  
14 fixing the unfair system, lifting the cap on permits  
15 and licenses, and enabling street vendors to legally  
16 operate their viable businesses, creating job  
17 opportunities for immigrant communities and  
18 generating tax revenue for the city by passing Intro  
19 1116 as soon as possible. This will alleviate the  
20 high rental fees of up to 25,000 dollars that vendors  
21 must pay in order to avoid harassment and potential  
22 confiscation of their good. In the meantime, the  
23 Street Vendor Project has been focusing on job  
24 opportunities for street vendors by finding funding  
25 to hire street vendors to make meals for food



2 distribution with many of the organizations who are  
3 on this call. The communities they are a part of  
4 with culturally sensitive food. We would love to  
5 work with the city to scale up this operation to hire  
6 more street vendors to contribute to food insecurity  
7 efforts. Thank you for your attention to this and--

8 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is up.

9 CARINA KAUFMAN GUTIERREZ: thank you to  
10 the committee for your time.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: It's a great idea.  
12 I would love to do that.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
14 testimony. Now, we will hear from Sara L. Elsebai.

15 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time will  
16 begin now.

17 SARA L. ELSEBAI: Good afternoon,  
18 everyone. Good afternoon, Chair and member of the  
19 Committee on Immigration. I want to thank you all  
20 for the opportunity to testify before you today. My  
21 name is Sara Elsebai and I am an immigration  
22 Navigator at the Arab American Association of New  
23 York. I would like to start by reinforcing the  
24 testimony of other organizations. I can say that the  
25 challenges faced by New York's Arab community and

2 Arab American community today are the most intense  
3 our organization has seen in the 20 years since our  
4 founding. These challenges are particularly acute  
5 for Arab-Americans whose immigration status is  
6 unsettled. The solutions being discussed today will  
7 have all meaningful impacts for tens of thousands of  
8 New Yorkers ensuring that immigrants will not have  
9 fears seeing their immigration case jeopardized as a  
10 result of the COVID-19 pandemic or any other future  
11 ones like it. In particular, though, I would like to  
12 address the importance of resolution 1399-2020  
13 addressing access to state and local benefits  
14 regardless of immigration status. This resolution,  
15 if brought into law, would have life-changing impacts  
16 for some of the New York's neediest families. In my  
17 casework with my clients and in our organization's  
18 role distributing directly throughout this crisis,  
19 the impact of exclusion from state and local benefits  
20 for immigrant families has become incredible clear.  
21 The exclusion from public benefits has left thousands  
22 of families who have lost income due to COVID-19  
23 without even the limit resource and support afforded  
24 to those with settled immigration status. This puts  
25 them into a debt trap. They will be hard-pressed to

2 escape after this crisis is over. And already there  
3 are thousands of families across our city with no  
4 means to provide for themselves who have no access to  
5 relief as a result of their immigration status.  
6 Background and growing household data background  
7 heavier for these families every day and with winter  
8 and start of another resurgence of the pandemic on  
9 the horizon, there is no relief in sight,  
10 unfortunately. So, for too many families, the only  
11 thing standing between them and homelessness right  
12 now is the ongoing eviction band. Even when the city  
13 emerges from the pandemic, the debts incurred to  
14 survive it by immigrant families will likely to be  
15 too much to bear for too many. With catastrophic  
16 consequences for tens of thousands of New Yorkers.  
17 Resolution 1399-2020 will not solve all of the  
18 problems faced by immigrant families, but it will  
19 provide significant. Access to unemployment benefits  
20 and other means of financial help can help alleviate  
21 the looming debt crisis immigrant families are  
22 facing, saving many from bankruptcy--

23 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time is up.

24 SARA L. ELSEBAI: and homelessness. And  
25 the families need significantly more support than

2 these resolutions provide for them, both the  
3 protections these resolutions will provide are an  
4 essential step. Arab New Yorkers are far from the  
5 largest immigrant group for in the city, but through  
6 the COVID-19 pandemic, we have found ourselves  
7 playing in outsized role in supporting our city.  
8 From the hospitals keeping our neighbors alive to the  
9 bow day goes and keeping them fed over the last five  
10 months, Arab New Yorkers have been on the front lines  
11 fighting for New York City, demonstrating the value  
12 central to Arab culture and Islamic faith. Charity,  
13 self-sacrifice, and duty to our community. Thank you  
14 all.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you.

16 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your  
17 testimony. Yes, at this time-- This ends our public  
18 panel section. If we have inadvertently missed  
19 anyone that is registered to testify today and has  
20 yet to be called, please use the zoom raise and  
21 functionality will be called in order. Seeing no  
22 hands, I am now going to turn it over to Chair  
23 Menchaca for closing remarks.

24 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. I want  
25 to thank all the staff for the incredible work. I

2 know you probably Artie know this. There is a  
3 massive invisible team that makes this zoom hearing  
4 happen, so I want to say thank you to all of you.  
5 All of those of you who interpret it on behalf of New  
6 Yorkers who are speaking in their language. This  
7 panel or this hearing started with four New Yorkers  
8 through spoke their stories about the need for  
9 government to step up and I just want to think about  
10 them right now as we heard from the Mayor's comp  
11 office and all of you who are tech conditions in this  
12 recovery and response. What I'm learning here, more  
13 than ever, is the importance of your work in the  
14 institutionalization of this response, this crisis  
15 response. So, for me, what I want to make sure you  
16 know is that we are going to continue to work  
17 together to build that resource and capacity building  
18 that you need. This city can't have an immigrant  
19 plan without you. The city can't do this alone  
20 because that's not how it works. Immigrants have  
21 relationships with all of you who are doing the work  
22 whether it is legal, healthcare, mutual aid, etc.  
23 So, I know that, you know that, but that needs to be  
24 integrated and everything that we do in this next  
25 budget, everything that we do to push the state to do

2 the right thing in Congress. And I know that a lot  
3 of us aren't necessarily feeling good about what  
4 Congress is doing right now, but we have to stay loud  
5 and vigilant. And so, with that, I'm hoping-- I  
6 think Martin Kim is here. That we work with the  
7 administration to pivot and focus on these issues  
8 that were brought up here. And I'm going to make a  
9 commitment to work with-- and I think Whitney said  
10 this-- with other mutually groups that are trying to  
11 do their best and ensure that they get the focus that  
12 they need from the city agencies. And so, Lorena and  
13 Caesar on my team, let's figure out how to do a  
14 citywide conversation with mutually groups to bring  
15 them in. Let's talk to them and let's figure out how  
16 they are engaging immigrants and ensuring that the  
17 Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs is working  
18 directly with them. That's what we do here in this  
19 committee. We hold people accountable. We hold our  
20 agencies accountable and that is because you are all  
21 on the ground seeing what you are seeing and bringing  
22 that to us. So, thank you to our committee staff and  
23 all of you for this hearing and I hope you stay safe  
24 and probably a lot of you have been sitting like me,  
25 so I hope you can do some stretches, some yoga

2 stretches just to get back in your body. Take care  
3 of yourself and your heart. Thank you. And I call  
4 this hearing to an end.

5 [gavel]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date October 8, 2020