

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

JOINTLY WITH

COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND WORKER PROTECTION
CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY
WITH COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND
WORKER PROTECTION

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April 15, 2025

Start: 10:08 a.m.

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HELD AT: COUNCIL CHAMBERS - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Alexa Avilés, Chairperson of the
Committee on Immigration

Julie Menin, Chairperson of the
Committee on Consumer and Worker
Protection

COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION:

Erik D. Bottcher
Gale A. Brewer
Carmen N. De La Rosa
Shahana Hanif
Rita C. Joseph
Shekar Krishnan

COUNCIL MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AND
WORKER PROTECTION:

Shaun Abreu
Gale A. Brewer
Shekar Krishnan

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OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:

Jumaane Williams, Public Advocate

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A P P E A R A N C E S

Vilda Vera Mayuga, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection

Michael Tiger, General Counsel of the New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection

Carlos Ortiz, Assistant Commissioner of External Affairs at New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection

Luisana, member of La Colmena

Amavilia, member of Mixteca

Madeleine Bravo, Legal Services Coordinator at La Colmena

Hildalyn Colon, Deputy Director of New Immigrant Community Empowerment

Jorge Paz-Reyes, Community Organizer at Mixteca

Nick Gulotta, self, former Director of Outreach and Organizing for the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

Natalia Nuñez Barragán, Senior Manager of Membership and Capacity Building at Immigrant ARC

Christian, self

Deborah Lee, Attorney-in-Charge of the Immigration Law Unit at the Legal Aid Society

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

Hannah Strauss, Supervising Attorney of the
Immigration Court Help Desk and the Family Group
Legal Orientation Program at Catholic Charities
Community Services

Marc Valinoti, Assistant Director of Immigrant
and DV Services at Northern Manhattan Improvement
Corporation

Sharon Brown, Rose of Sharon Enterprises

Raul Rivera, self

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

Alice Davis, Deputy Director at Catholic
Migration Services

Stephanie Rovine, Healing Centers Program and
Development Director

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON
CONSUMER AND WORKER PROTECTION 5

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, good morning. This is a microphone check for the Committee on Immigration joint with the Committee on Consumer and Worker Protection. This is being done in the Chambers. Today's date is April 15, 2025. This recording is done by Ginelle Yearwood.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, and welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for the Committee on Immigration joint with the Committee on Consumer and Worker Protection.

At this time, we would like you to place all electronic devices to vibrate.

If you wish to submit testimony today, you could do so via email at testimony@Council.nyc.gov.

If you wish to submit in-person testimony, you need to fill out an appearance card by the Sergeant-at-Arms desk.

If you need a translation device, please contact a Sergeant-at-Arms.

Please do not approach the dais. I repeat, do not approach the dais.

INTERPRETER: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

1 COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH COMMITTEE ON 6
2 CONSUMER AND WORKER PROTECTION

3 INTERPRETER: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

4 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Chair, we're ready to
5 begin.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: [GAVEL] This
7 meeting is called to order.

8 Good morning, everyone. I am Council
9 Member Alexa Avilés, Chair of the Committee on
10 Immigration. Thank you for joining us. Today, we will
11 be exploring how the City is combating immigration
12 services fraud. I'd like to thank Council Member
13 Julie Menin, Chair of the Committee on Consumer and
14 Worker Protection, for Co-Chairing this important
15 hearing. I'd also like to thank the representatives
16 of the Administration, members of the public, and my
17 Committee Colleagues.

18 Please note, we have interpretation
19 available in Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Mandarin.
20 If you are in the Council Chambers today and
21 interested in listening to this hearing in Spanish,
22 Haitian Creole, or Mandarin, there are headsets
23 available in the rotunda. If you would like to
24 testify and require interpretation in Spanish,
25 Haitian Creole, or Mandarin, please indicate on your

witness slip form, or inform the Sergeant if you have
already submitted your slip.

As is becoming a tradition, I'd like to
begin our hearing by reminding everyone that New York
City has always been and will always be a city of
immigrants. In fact, according to the most recent
annual report of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant
Affairs, immigrants and children of immigrants make
up 60 percent of the New York City population. This
number does not even begin to include those who are
neighbors with, friends with, or in community with an
immigrant. This city is special because of the people
who live here, and we must continue to stand up
against bullying threats to our community.

In today's hearing, we will hear from the
Administration about their efforts to prevent
immigration services fraud and support fraud victims.
Over the past year, complaints of immigration
services fraud in New York have increased, and
advocates have consistently been ringing the alarm on
these growing threats. Oftentimes, immigration
services fraud becomes more rampant in periods where
demand for legal services increases. This could be
because of increased immigration or because of

immigration legal landscape has become so much more complicated. There is increasing significant concern around fraud that will occur as access to immigration benefits is destroyed by this current Presidential Administration. The Trump Administration has decimated immigration relief for numerous parolees and temporary protected status recipients, and is clearly uninterested in stopping this destruction anytime soon. The Trump Administration is complicating access to work permits, threatening green card holders, making immigrants scared to pay their taxes, to go to the doctor, to take their children to school, and to access critical services. The people whose lives are catastrophically changed by this draconian decision-making from our current President are likely to become desperate to find ways to protect themselves or their families from deportation. Unscrupulous actors prey upon this desperation, and immigrants can find themselves overcharged, lied to, and in some instances have their immigration cases irreparably damaged by fraudulent providers. In some cases, fraud may also be more subtle. The complexity of immigration law often requires support from a professional attorney,

and in New York, there are a lot of requirements that service providers must follow to ensure that they do not overstep their jurisdictions and provide legal advice. The provision of specific legal information and defense must be in the form of a professional lawyer, because without this expertise, immigration cases could be filed improperly and cause significant issues.

I've just covered some of what this hearing will be about, and I will now take a moment to describe what this hearing is not about. A wholesale attack on our city's bona fide legal service providers. The President recently issued an executive order purporting to target immigration lawyers with additional scrutiny and legal sanctions in retaliation for lawsuits filed against their Administration. Let me make one thing abundantly clear. This Council stands with organizations and providers who offer expert legal assistance and compassionate wraparound services to our immigrant community members and their families. In fact, immigrant-serving organizations are some of the only institutions standing in the breach as ICE disappears community members from our neighborhoods. The Council

has a proud history of funding these experienced and courageous providers of immigration services and will continue to do so in the months and years to come.

This hearing will examine the City's efforts to connect individuals to seeking immigration services with those bona fide providers and help them steer clear of the unaccredited ones. The City must ensure that immigrants are accessing proper professional legal services and not led astray by unscrupulous actors or non-legal service providers. The City must also ensure that immigrants who are victims of fraud are able to submit a complaint and find some resource that relieves them for some of the damages that incur. We look forward to hearing from the Administration on how they are informing, empowering, and protecting our immigrant communities.

At the Council's last hearing on this topic in 2021, the Committee heard from the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. I'm grateful that DCWP will testify today and look forward to hearing their testimony. I'm disappointed, however, that MOIA has elected not to attend today's important hearing. It is a shame that the public will not be

able to hear MOIA share their work their office is
doing to combat immigrant services fraud. I
understand that MOIA will be submitting written
testimony, and I look forward to following up with
them with questions.

Lastly, the Committee on Immigration will
hear Council Member Won's bill, Introduction 980,
which increases penalties for violations of
requirements that apply to immigration services. I
look forward to hearing more from Council Member Won
on this bill and her support as we seek to improve
the services provided to immigrants.

I would like to thank all the Committee
Staff for their work on this hearing, including
Nicole Catá, Senior Legislative Counsel; Rebecca
Barilla, Policy Analyst; Carolina Gill, Principal
Capital Analyst; and Florentine Kabore, Unit Head. I
would also like to thank the Council's Oversight and
Investigations Division for their support, including
Meg Powers, Acting Deputy Director; Zachary Mayer-
Casalas (phonetic); Assistant Deputy Director, Katie
Sinise (phonetic); Investigative Policy Analyst; and
finally, I have to thank my Staff, Chief-of-Staff
Edward Cerna; Deputy Chief-of-Staff Christina

Bottego, and my Legislative Fellow Cate Byrne, and everyone working in the background to make this hearing run smoothly.

I will now turn it over to Council Member Menin for her opening statement.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Thank you so much, Chair Avilés. I'm Julie Menin, Chair of the Committee on Consumer and Worker Protection, and we want to welcome you to today's joint hearing on Combating Immigration Services Fraud, as well as a hearing on Introduction Numbers 205 and 980.

When I previously served as Commissioner of the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection, President Obama had announced a series of broad administrative reforms to the immigration system. This unfortunately created new opportunities for fraudsters looking to profit from immigrant vulnerability. At that time, in response to the increased risk for immigrant New Yorkers, I co-led a task force in partnership with the Office of the New York Attorney General and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs that dedicated increased enforcement resources and conducted a public awareness campaign to stop predators from taking

1
2 advantage of our immigrant communities. Once again,
3 recent rapid changes in federal immigration and
4 enforcement policy have created unfortunately a ripe
5 environment for immigration services fraud, and
6 comprehensive action by the City is absolutely
7 necessary to combat this increase in vulnerability
8 for immigrant New Yorkers.

9 At today's hearing, we look forward to
10 learning more about the Administration's work to
11 educate and protect New Yorkers from immigration
12 services fraud and to enforce laws that regulate the
13 behavior of immigration service providers.

14 The Committee on Consumer and Worker
15 Protection will also be hearing feedback on
16 Introduction Number 205, sponsored by Council Member
17 Hanif.

18 In closing, I want to thank our Committee
19 Staff and my Staff for their hard work in putting
20 together today's hearing and my Colleague, Council
21 Member Avilés, for all of her hard work in making
22 today happen.

23 I want to first of all recognize our
24 Colleagues who have joined, Council Member Abreu,
25 Council Member Brewer, and we will acknowledge

additional Colleagues as they come in, and I'm now going to turn it over to the Public Advocate to make a statement.

PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE WILLIAMS: Thank you so much, Madam Chair. My name is Jumaane Williams. As mentioned, I'm the Public Advocate of the City of New York. Thank you, Chairs Menin and Avilés, for holding today's hearing and allowing me opportunity to provide a brief statement.

These are pretty dire times for many New York communities, including our immigrant communities. The Mayor has officially begun saluting Kristi Noem and ICE in public. While we must continue to condemn the Mayor for his inability to put the safety of New Yorkers over himself, we must be laser-focused on what this means for our communities. It has now been confirmed that the Mayor engaged in quid pro quo, a fact that was confirmed by the judge in his dismissal, a fact that the Mayor continues to lie about through omission, and his new platform puts all of us in danger and none more than our newest New Yorkers and immigrants who are afraid. I now believe that the Mayor believed there wasn't a quid pro quo because he believes in Donald Trump and his MAGA

agenda and believes if he was going to do it anyway,
it's not a quid pro quo. It is, and we're all
suffering from it. History's not going to be kind to
the Trump Administration and it's MAGA policies.
History won't be kind to the disgrace of Mayor Adams
and his Adams Administration.

The byproduct of many of his decisions is
an environment that allows fear and disinformation to
spread like wildfire throughout our city. An
environment such as this opens a gap in our society
where scams, fraudsters, and bad faith actors can
take advantage of the most vulnerable New Yorkers.
These actors must be stopped, penalized, and held
accountable for violations of law and decency. One
such actor impersonated a number of federal law
enforcement agents and demanded huge sums of money in
exchange for expedited visa applications. Another
culprit posed as an attorney and solicited bribes
from individuals seeking legal pathways toward
citizenship. Make no mistake, increase in these kinds
of scams and scammers, which have always been here,
are a result of the President and the Mayor's dual
efforts to criminalize and obscure the legal
immigration process. It is crucial that elected

officials and advocates make every effort to educate our constituents on these scams and prosecute those who think they can profit from exploiting an already broken system. Every New Yorker deserves the opportunity to be a part of our great city. I'll continue to stand by my Colleagues and the advocates on the ground in order to protect the rights and opportunities that we are entitled to. We will not back down in the face of this corruption, exploitation, and disinformation.

I want to thank the legal services and many of the service providers who continue to do the best they can in some very tough situations. I am worried that the Mayor doesn't really care about what's happening and the harm that's being caused, and I don't think New Yorkers can look to him for leadership, but I'm asking those who are in agencies, who are in charge of agencies, who are working in agencies, who know what the right thing is to do, to do the best they can with what they have, where they are in tough situations. Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Public Advocate Williams. Thank you for your steadfast

advocacy and support of immigrant New Yorkers and
your leadership.

I guess now, with that, we will turn it
over to the Committee Counsel to administer the oath.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL CATÁ: Thank you,
Chairs. We will now hear from the Administration. We
will hear from the Commissioner of the Department of
Consumer and Worker Protection, Vilda Vera Mayuga;
Assistant Commissioner of External Affairs, Carlos
Ortiz; and General Counsel, Michael Tiger.

Before we begin, I will administer the
affirmation. Panelists, please raise your right hand.

Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
whole truth, and nothing but the truth, before these
Committees, and to respond honestly to Council Member
questions?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: I do.

GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: I do.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I do.

SUBCOMMITTEE COUNSEL CATÁ: Thank you. You
may begin when ready.

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Thank you for the
beautiful pronunciation, by the way, all the names.
That was really nice.

So, good morning, Chair Menin, Chair
Avilés, Public Advocate, and Members of the
Committees. My name is Vilda Vera Mayuga,
Commissioner of the Department of Consumer and Worker
Protection, DCWP. Today, I am joined by our General
Counsel, Michael Tiger, and Assistant Commissioner of
External Affairs, Carlos Ortiz. Thank you for the
opportunity to testify on immigration services fraud
and related legislation as we continue our shared
mission to protect immigrant New Yorkers from harm
and exploitation.

DCWP is a key resource for all New
Yorkers, providing fundamental consumer and worker
protections and financial empowerment programming
across the five boroughs. We are dedicated to
ensuring that consumers who have been exploited or
deceived have a recourse, that workers have a
passionate defender of their rights, and that all New
Yorkers have the opportunity, the support they need
to improve their financial health. All of these
protections and resources are available to New
Yorkers, regardless of immigration status. In the
past three years, we have helped deliver more than
1.3 billion dollars back to New Yorkers through debt

relief efforts, restitution, and financial
empowerment programming.

In New York City, DCWP protects immigrant
consumers in several ways, using our broad consumer
protection powers. This includes laws and rules we
enforce regarding immigration service providers,
which are businesses that charge fees for any kind of
immigration-related service. DCWP also licenses
employment agencies, which are businesses that
provide job search assistance for a fee. Lastly, we
use our signature consumer protection law, which
applies to all businesses in New York City, to
prohibit deceptive and unconscionable business
practices against New Yorkers.

Immigration service providers are not
lawyers, and there are prohibitions and limits to the
types of services they can provide to consumers
seeking immigration-related assistance. We have also
found employment agencies to similarly target
immigrant communities and individuals. DCWP conducts
enforcement of immigration service providers and
employment agencies through field inspections and
attorney-led investigations that lead to actions

before the Office of Administrative Trials and
Hearings or state court.

Fraudulent immigration service providers
and employment agencies remain an ongoing challenge
for us due to their flight-by-night nature. Many
operate out of temporary storefronts, private
residences, instant messaging apps, or online
platforms, only to disappear after being paid by a
consumer. Additionally, due to fear of government
interaction, immigrant communities often hesitate to
file complaints, which are essential to an
investigatory process. Regardless, DCWP continues to
use its civil enforcement authority where and when we
can to hold unscrupulous businesses accountable, to
educate New Yorkers on their rights, and to encourage
consumers to come to us when those rights have been
exploited.

In 2025, we have escalated efforts to
better support immigrant communities in light of
recent events. For example, last month, I convened a
roundtable of community leaders and legal advocates
to discuss and identify emerging trends of consumer
harm and ways to strengthen our collaboration to
support New Yorkers. We have also engaged with each

of the City's District's Attorney's Offices and the
New York State Attorney General's Office to establish
sustainable partnerships and reduce duplicative
efforts, improve information sharing, and better our
interagency coordination. Recently, our field
enforcement team conducted proactive inspections of
business advertising themselves as immigration
service providers as well as employment agencies. In
the past two months, the team conducted over 750
inspections resulting in almost 80 summonses.

We have also stepped up our
investigations, including major results against
immigration service providers and employment
agencies, such as 100,000 dollars in penalties
against Horizonte de Esperanza Court and a trial
decision of 1.6 million dollars with significant
consumer restitution against CMP Employment for
illegal activity targeting immigrants. Lastly, under
our consumer protection law, we investigated ASA
College after receiving photographs of false and
deceptive advertisements the for-profit school was
using in New York City subways. These advertisements
were clearly targeted to immigrants with promises of
assistance in obtaining certain visas if one were

enrolled at the school. Our efforts resulted in a settlement agreement with ASA, ultimately putting it out of business and stopping further harm to immigrant students.

As I mentioned to the Committees before, we always want to ensure that our enforcement is paired with education so that we are empowering consumers with the information they need to protect themselves on the front end. For example, we are currently running a digital education campaign across social media platforms to highlight and educate New Yorkers under protections related to immigration service providers. Last week, we coordinated a citywide day of action mobilizing volunteers across the boroughs to distribute educational materials connecting with over 5,500 New Yorkers and ensuring that they are aware of their rights under our laws. This builds on our efforts over the past three years, conducting nearly 600 immigrant-focused outreach events to 63,000 New Yorkers on the protections and services we offer regardless of immigration status.

Turning to today's legislation, Introduction 205 would require DCWP to conduct outreach, education, and advertising about fraudulent

schemes committed by immigration service providers and how to avoid them. The advertisement requirements includes television, internet, radio, print, subway, and LinkNYC kiosk. The legislation would also require the agency to report annually on its outreach and advertising efforts. We support the intent of this bill and are committed to sustainable interventions to help New Yorkers avoid common fraudulent schemes. However, we have concerns with the overly burdensome advertising mandates which will require significant new resources. We look forward to working with Council on this legislation and ensuring that New Yorkers are equipped to avoid fraudulent schemes by bad actors.

Next, Introduction 980 would increase civil penalties for immigration service providers for violations of DCWP's laws and rules. We support Introduction 980 and look forward to working with all of you on this bill.

I would like to reiterate that DCWP's protections and resources are available to all New Yorkers regardless of immigration status. Especially as it relates to the issues we are discussing today, we encourage anyone who has been harmed by fraud or

misrepresentations to please contact our agency so we can get to work assisting you. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on today's bills and our essential work uplifting all New Yorkers. We look forward to our continued partnership with all of you to protect our city's residents, and I welcome any questions you may have for further discussion.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much, Commissioner.

So, we'll just jump into the questions. So, what are the primary types of immigration services fraud that you are seeing, and are there types of frauds or fraud or schemes that target particular immigrant communities?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Thank you, Council Member. I think generally the patterns sort of repeat in terms of what is offered and it could be people pretending to be attorneys. We know that the reliance in the word notario particularly for the Spanish speaking countries, right? Where you have to be an attorney to really be a notary and it's not the reality in the U.S. and so people will follow that. Charging for forms that are otherwise free from the government directly and basically providing

immigration advice that... obviously, we know it can be so dangerous for somebody who is not an expert and professional duly certified to provide that advice.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: One thing I wanted to add to what I've been hearing a lot recently is folks who engage with immigration service providers that claim to have special relationships with the government, that seem to make promises they can't keep, for example, and that leads immigrant consumers down a path that is dangerous for their status.

GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: And the immigrant consumers don't know what's been submitted, if anything, so there's a lack of clarity from the immigrant about whether something was submitted and what exactly documentation they, and also getting documentation back that they submitted to the provider.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Right. And your testimony also noted social media, the use of WhatsApp and WeChat, which we see as a significant proliferator of fraudulent scams. We'll talk more about that later, but so how does DCWP investigate

fraud that is rampant in a specific immigrant
community, such as the fraud on WhatsApp or WeChat?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Right. No, thank
you. So, I mean, like I said, right in my testimony,
we're proud of the work that we do that is for
everybody, regardless of immigration status. So, I
think we have different cases that we've done that
may not be specifically about immigration services,
but have a focus on the immigrant community. I gave
the example of ASA College that basically was
promising regularizing your immigration status simply
by becoming a student at that institution. We have
other cases that, again, that they just will target
the immigrant community because they feel they might
not be as knowledgeable about their rights so that is
something that we do see. But generally, when
somebody files a complaint, we will definitely be
looking at it. In the case specific of immigration
service providers, our Consumer Services Unit will
definitely flag it for our attorneys because we
recognize that this type of industry requires a
different approach than trying to contact a business
and try to mediate because then they're just going to
disappear. Once they obtain people's money, they

might engage them a little longer, but once they find out that a government agency is looking into them, they might disappear. So, we make a little bit of a different assessment and take a different approach with that industry by having an attorney's review and determine what additional information we may need for a complainant to get more data and be able to decide on the next steps and the General Counsel oversees that unit. Is there anything else to add?

GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: No, I think you covered sort of how we handle in a general sense.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. And then for something such as where it's happening on social media, where there isn't necessarily, well, I guess there's an entity behind an account, but not necessarily a brick-and-mortar entity. How does the agency handle that type of investigation?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: It's going to depend. I mean, we rely a lot, obviously, on the consumers that are giving us the information on any more details that may help us identify the individual behind the account. I think it's important to stress that we recognize how difficult it could be for an individual to come forward and report an issue that's

1
2 happening where they feel that they've been targeted
3 and scammed, and we do want people to know that it
4 doesn't have to be the individual to file the
5 complaint either. It could also be a friend or a
6 relative, a community-based organization could bridge
7 that gap with us to provide the information if
8 there's fear. But when it comes to, yeah, using
9 WhatsApp, it is a challenge that we encounter. We're
10 still going to be depending on information coming
11 from the complainant.

12 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I think to
13 add into that point, the industry of immigration
14 providers historically has had challenges because of
15 its fly-by-night aspect. I think WeChat and WhatsApp,
16 social media, only exacerbate that issue. And part of
17 the communication we do on the education side is very
18 much focused on preventative measures. Ensuring that
19 you're going to a brick-and-mortar business, ensuring
20 that a business has proper surety bond signage up,
21 ensuring that you're receiving contracts, that
22 they're not taking your originals. These preventative
23 measures ensure that you're not falling into a
24 deception from a business operating off of WhatsApp.

2 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: However, so
3 obviously these types of crimes, right, are very
4 particular and do require some very particular
5 expertise. Does DCWP, I'm going to say this wrong at
6 least 10 times, forgive me, does the agency have in-
7 house capacity to investigate cyber crimes, or how
8 does the agency engage in that type of investigation?

9 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Thank you. I'm
10 really glad you brought that up because it's
11 certainly, right, and we don't do criminal
12 investigations. We're a civil enforcement agency. And
13 that is also one of the reasons why we have the
14 relationships, right, of establishing connections
15 with the Attorney General's Office or the District
16 Attorney's Offices because there are some aspects of
17 this industry that depending on the case are
18 definitely going to be better suited for a criminal
19 investigation or agencies that have certain powers
20 that we don't have just based on being a civil
21 enforcement agency.

22 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: Yeah. I mean,
23 that's, I think, a reality, but that's why, as the
24 Commissioner has said, we're doubling our efforts to
25 have information sharing with the District Attorney's

Office, with the Attorney General's Office. And I think it's still important for complaints to be made because even if we can't handle it directly or we determine that we are not the agency best in a place to help this individual consumer or pursue this individual investigation, we have contacts at different offices across the five boroughs, and we can talk to them and figure out what's the best approach overall, marshalling all of the City's resources to move forward.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So in this instance, again, I guess, just last week I had a case in my office where someone sent 1,500 dollars to a person on WhatsApp because it was recommended by a neighbor that this was a speedy way to get their immigration services bumped up. He sent his entire life savings to an unknown entity. What happens? Can you walk me through how DCWP handles this case?

GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: So, thank you for that question. And again, I want to reiterate something that the Commissioner said that if, for example, the consumer doesn't want to come forward, a family member, an advocate can come forward on their behalf. I think the important part is having some

sort of contact information that we can continue a conversation to understand the facts. So, if we got that type of complaint, we would review it. As the Commissioner said, all immigration service provider complaints that come in through our consumer services unit now go directly to a lawyer for review. And that lawyer would look at, see if it's connected to a brick-and-mortar location, or if there's any contact info with a person that we can identify. And we can do research to see what we know about that individual, whether there are any aliases. But ultimately, if we think it goes beyond what we can reach, whether we think it's criminal, maybe the person who is holding the WhatsApp account is not even in this country. And that's why, as I said, we're redoubling our efforts to talk to District Attorney's Offices who might be better resourced and might have jurisdictional authority that might be better used to approach some of those cases. But in the first instance, it will go to a lawyer, we'll look at it, and we'll see what we can do based on the laws that we have, and we'll make a determination about whether this is something that we can pursue, or whether there are different actors within the

regulatory space in New York City who might be better positioned to take the lead on it.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, how much of those kinds of cases are referred out for next step to handle?

GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: I don't think I have those numbers right here for you right now. And honestly, what we want to do, and one of the reasons we're happy to be here today is just to, for you, for the Council Members and individual members to hear from us that to talk to people in your community, talk to your organization so they can go and make complaints to us. Because we're not getting hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of complaints, even though we know the harm is out there, and it's important that we hear from you and we hear from organizations and we hear from stakeholders and make complaints through our portal, our consumer complaint portal, which is used for all the consumer protection complaints, can make a complaint there. Again, it doesn't have to be the individual, it can be a family member, it can be an advocate, but it's very important that we all work together to get the facts on the ground so we can make those assessments.

2 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: I think, if I may
3 add, Chair Avilés, it's part of why it's important,
4 right, Introduction 205, which is all about outreach
5 and increasing the ways that we reach individuals.
6 Because I'm proud of the work that we've done, I'm
7 not going to tell you not, right? I mean, we do get
8 out there, we partner with all of your offices, we
9 partner with some of the organizations that are even
10 here today, and it's about getting the word out
11 because, unfortunately, in the case of your
12 constituent, they're probably not going to get their
13 money, and you're right, this is their life savings.
14 I mean, back when I was at the Attorney General's
15 Office in 2010, I think it was, I was there, similar
16 situations, and it's heartbreaking, obviously, to
17 meet with these individuals and tell them, thank you
18 for coming and telling me about this, let's try to
19 stop the conduct, but I don't know if I can get you
20 the money back. Because it is the nature of the
21 business, they fly by night, they disappear, they're
22 gone, you can't track them anymore. And, you know,
23 obviously the hope is that through more outreach that
24 we'll continue doing and strengthening by some of the
25 things that are in Intro. 205, and just more

partnership, we continue to get the word out, and individuals, right, that, like you said, a neighbor said, I mean, I joked other times, I think at other hearings that my mom will get her advice from her hair salon, right, and it's just like, oh my gosh, your daughter's a Commissioner. But things like that, right, where you really want to get who's the trusted voice, who is the trusted voice where people are getting the information, how do we convince them to come to us or report on behalf of someone else so that then we can have more information to do the enforcement to the extent that we can, or partner with others that may have other tools that we don't have?

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. I guess 100 percent I think we are clear and hold consensus that preventative engagement is critical. However, it does beg a question around how the City is building its apparatus. If it understands that, let's say, people are victims of fraud through social media, it begs the question how are we building our apparatus to be able to track that and combat that? And so I guess what I'm not entirely hearing is how the agency is building its own capacity to be able either to

investigate and/or address that side of it, and maybe that's not your role in particular, but we know cyber crime is probably higher than maybe almost any other crime so what I'm curious to understand is how the agency is earnestly addressing, building its own capacity to be able to support people and/or the City engage in as much prevention and response to the crimes.

So, in terms of just really quickly, and I'll pass it over to my Co-Chair here, have there been any types of changes and/or frequency of immigration service fraud since the November presidential election or inauguration? Have you seen any changes?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: I mean, I think we've only received eight complaints so far this year in 2025, so we haven't seen an uptick, at least not yet. We have received 48 this year regarding employment agencies that sometimes we've seen them trying to offer their services under the guise of trying to find somebody a job. We'll continue to obviously monitor and it's one of the things that has complaints come in and we get the word out

2 anecdotally what we hear, we can see what trends, but
3 so far has not been a big jump on complaints.

4 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it, got it,
5 thank you.

6 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I would say
7 on the day of action that we held, I think it was
8 last week at 10 locations across the city, people in
9 the streets, our folks in the community, they were
10 definitely receptive and wanted to talk with our
11 volunteers about this issue. Immigration service
12 providers in particular, we were able to distribute
13 information 10, 11 languages. So, within that
14 context, I think there was definitely questions to
15 the community and I think, again, to the
16 Commissioner's point, why we are supportive of Intro.
17 205, albeit it would require new resources, why
18 Intro. 982 is a good approach as well to addressing
19 higher penalties for illegal activity. So, yeah,
20 definitely anecdotally I could say it was definitely
21 some good feedback from the community.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. Thank you. I
23 mean, I think it's from my perspective, there has
24 been a clear uptick in fraud in communities. I think
25 unfortunately what we're also seeing is a clear

distrust or not knowing the local apparatus, where do you go for help and not wholly trusting in that as well so I think we have a double-edged challenge as a City.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I agree and I think for us, the work of the agency and the successes that we've been able to bring New Yorkers that have been able to come to us is something we're very proud of, but spreading the word of the name Department of Consumer Worker Protection is part of my, I guess, bailiwick and what I want to work on more and more because I do think once folks do get to Mike's team or to our Office of Labor Policy and Standards or to Office of Financial Empowerment, I do think that they have really strong outcomes coming out of them.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, thank you, I'd like to recognize we've been joined by Council Member Hanif.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. Thank you so much.

Number of questions, but I just want to start with the fact that MOIA is not here. As you were testifying and we're talking about such an

important issue, it just strikes me as appalling and unbelievable that the City agency that is charged with working with our immigrant communities is not here, and I have to say as someone who has led three City agencies, I cannot recall a single time during my tenure as Commissioner that either myself or other fellow Commissioners simply wouldn't come to a hearing. The fact the whole agency is not here, and I know you're here and we so appreciate that, so it's not, it is just more, we have to say on the record how appalling it is that the agency that is charged with working with our immigrant communities is failing to show up on such an important issue. And honestly, it's a slap in the face not only to the City Council, but to immigrants all across New York City. So, with that said... and we can't really have a fulsome hearing. You know, we just, we really can't. We're working obviously on the important work that you all do as an agency, but not having MOIA here is really shocking.

In terms of enforcement strategy, I know you talked a little bit in your testimony about the enforcement strategy that you're doing. Can you

distinguish between how much of it is proactive as
opposed to responsive to complaints?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Of course. Thank
you, Council Member. Certainly, most of it, I mean,
we've done a big push for proactive investigation
combined between immigration service providers,
businesses that we've identified and employment
agency. We've done 750 by identifying, doing our own
research and identifying places that either advertise
as such or our inspectors have observed when they're
doing their work. If there is a complaint, of course,
we can take a look, but those usually when they come
in, we're going to be doing what General Counsel Mike
Tiger was explaining to make sure that we run them by
an attorney so we don't scare away a business that we
want to pursue. But most of the ones we've done
recently have been proactive investigations by
identifying the places and going out and finding them
and I think we've issued about 80 summonses as a
result of those.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: And in your
testimony, you talked about the enforcement you've
done in the past two months. Can you talk in a
broader sense about how many inspections of

immigration service providers the agency has done
annually since 2022?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Okay. Thank you,
Council Member. So going backwards since 2022, we've
done over 600 inspection of ISPs. We did not conduct
any in 2022. We did 44 in 2023, 32 in 2024, and 541
this year.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: And how many
inspectors do you have?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: We have an active
head count of 87 in our Enforcement Division that
does include also our operations and admin folks. But
I would say about 32 are actively out there on this
and other issues. Some are specific to tobacco
enforcement or petroleum inspections.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I would
just note that about 18 of those 87 have been
assigned to other operations, the Sheriff's task
force, for example, or the Mayor's Office of
Assessments.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: And how are you
receiving the complaints about immigration services
fraud, and how would you say the complaints are then

being addressed? If you could talk about the
sequencing.

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: I'm so sorry. Can
you repeat that?

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Oh, sure. So how
are you receiving the complaints about immigration
services fraud? I know obviously the portal and other
ways, but if you could talk specifically about how
you're receiving these complaints.

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Thank you, Council
Member. Yes, so like you mentioned, the portal is one
way, and then sometimes we get them through a
community-based organization or a Council Member's
office. Council Member Won, for example, worked
really hard in actually helping us identify after
they saw flyers advertising an immigration service
provider on Roosevelt Avenue, and that is the case
that we actually did resolve last year for 100,000
dollars in penalties. Unfortunately, we didn't have
complainants or individuals come forward that we
could get restitution for, but we did resolve at
least that case. So that's one example that came from
a Council Member's office.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: How many languages
is the portal in?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Is the portal in?

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Yeah. In other
words, I'm concerned about language access and I just
want to understand that element of it.

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: It can be in any
language. It can be translated into any of the
languages for people to use it so it's friendly in
that way.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: So there are no
barriers, you feel, in terms of language access?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: No. Absolutely not.
Even, I mean, in education, we have eight people in
our Outreach Team that speaks eight languages other
than English, for example, also to counter that with
our education. But yeah, in terms of complaints
coming in, I don't see a barrier for people to do it
in a language where they're comfortable.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I wouldn't
say, though, that there's no barrier, of course, to
the portal. There's still tech issues, I mean, people
having to use technology, for example, which is why
we want to diversify the mechanisms of how we get

1 complaints, whether that's the portal, of course,
2 which has been driving more complaints to us
3 naturally, but also 3-1-1, in-person meetings, we are
4 very accessible with direct phone numbers that lead
5 to our staff and direct emails lead to our staff. So,
6 I think these are all techniques to make sure that we
7 get the complaints in and that we're addressing where
8 people might have troubles with accessing government.
9

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Yeah. I'm concerned
11 because we all know in this climate, people are not
12 going to go onto the portal and report this so what
13 other ways is the agency working to try to address
14 that issue and get over the distrust and mistrust of
15 government?

16 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: 100 percent, and
17 that's why we were mentioning before that one of the
18 ways is like, it doesn't have to be the individual,
19 right? It could be a relative, it could be a friend,
20 it could be a community-based organization, it could
21 be a Council Member, it could be over the phone, it
22 could be an email, there's different ways. It could
23 be anonymous. Obviously, the challenge with an
24 anonymous complaint is that we can't have that
25 interaction with a complainant to get more follow-up

questions answered that would assist in developing our investigation, but anybody can file it on behalf of an individual and not identify that individual, at least not immediately. If we need more information, we'll engage in that back and forth to see what we can get and getting the comfort level to be high enough for the individuals who's impacted so that we can help them. It is very stressful. I often say, it's easy for me to say, please come, we'll help you, but I'm not the one going through it. So, we don't take it lightly that it is a big challenge for people to overcome and just even take that first step. So sometimes, for example, when you go to the portal, in the case of worker protection, for example, people can just ask a question. Perhaps you don't want to really file a complaint yet. You just have a question. So, we're going to figure out whatever ways. It's part of, I think, what we're here today to continue finding ways to improve what we do and how we do it, and that's why we held a round table a couple weeks ago with also those in this space so that we could get that feedback. It's like, how can we make sure that people really come to us and tell

us so that we can do our best to stop the illegal
behavior?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I would say
also on the outreach side, just to jump in quickly,
Chair, I'm sorry, that in the past three years, we've
done about 2,000 outreach events. I would say 600 of
those were with audiences or subject matter that
directly pertained or had an immigrant focus. I
think, for me, it's incredibly essential that the
agency maintains relationships with community-based
organizations. That leverages our resources
appropriately to reach into communities that
otherwise wouldn't have access to us. It is an
ongoing project, as the Commissioner maintained, and
we always have to reinvigorate those relationships,
but it's something that we're committed to doing and
sustaining.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: I mean, one
recommendation would be to work with sister agencies,
DOE, HRA, where there's going to be a lot of touch
points in making sure you're doing a robust
advertising campaign that, again, is disseminated
through those sister agencies I think would be really
important to do.

A question about OATH. So, I know the number of complaints regarding immigration service providers has increased from 2022 to 2023 and 2024, but the number of cases at OATH has not increased. There were just four such cases in 2023 and 2024 combined. What accounts for that difference?

GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: Thank you, Chair. I mean, the number of complaints that you're seeing in that data set that reflects any complaint with any amount of information that's come into the portal. Unfortunately, often we see that there is threadbare information. That's why we want to sort of continue to build trust so we continue to have ongoing conversations. But it is a challenge that we face that sometimes the complaints come in through the portal or through 3-1-1 without sufficient information. Or, again, another one of the systemic challenges that we and other regulators face is the fly-by-night operations of many of these businesses, and so sometimes we'll begin an investigation and then by the time our lawyers are engaging and drafting a summons, there's no one to serve anymore. And that's a real challenge. It's not just us. But

from year to year, that can affect the number of
summons as we actually file.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. I have more
questions, but I now want to turn it over to my
colleagues.

I know Council Member Hanif was going to
make an opening statement, I believe.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Yes, thank you. Hi,
everyone. Good morning.

I'm Council Member Shahana Hanif. Thank
you to Chairs Avilés and Menin for holding today's
important hearing and for including my Intro. 205 on
the agenda. I'd also like to thank Chair Avilés and
Council Members Narcisse, Ung, Marte, Krishnan, Lee
for introducing this bill alongside me.

I'm the proud daughter of two Bangladeshi
immigrants and I was raised in Kensington in
Brooklyn's Little Bangladesh, and I now have the
privilege of representing my community as a Council
Member for the 39th District. When I was a child, my
parents weren't yet citizens, and I know from my
upbringing that when you have precarious immigration
status, there is an ever-present sense of anxiety. My
parents were living typical Brooklyn lives, working,

raising children, and making friends in their new community. But at the same time, they were fearful that everything could be stripped away in seconds. This is an experience all too familiar to immigrant New Yorkers, arriving in a new place where you may not speak the language, may not understand the local laws, and are simply trying to build a life and stay in the place you now call home. This is where immigrant legal service fraudsters thrive. These bad actors, who are oftentimes not lawyers, prey on New Yorkers by charging high fees for bad services that may actually harm their immigration cases. What is even more frustrating is that City agencies and our network of contracted non-profit organizations can often provide these needed services for free or at low cost. For immigrants who are often living paycheck to paycheck, falling victim to fraud can be financially devastating. I was driven to introduce this bill after speaking with a recently arrived asylum seeker at a Key to the City event in my District who told me about the toll that fraud took on her family. This longstanding issue has become even worse following the recent increased volume of new arrivals. The City's Department of Consumer and

Worker Protection describes the number of complaints on this issue as at an all-time high, and the newly established State Office of New Americans also describes an uptick. I'm grateful that DCWP is conducting outreach and education about fraudulent schemes committed by providers of immigration legal services, including through their Consumer Bill of Rights regarding immigration assistance service providers. Intro. 205 would strengthen this work by requiring outreach to include information about common fraudulent schemes and how to avoid them and to be conducted through specific media, including television, the internet, radio, print, subway advertisements, and LinkNYC kiosks. Outreach materials would also be distributed in public places. The bill would also require the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection to report annually on its outreach and education efforts. I urge my Colleagues to join this bill as a sponsor, and I look forward to the continued question and testimonies here. Thank you so much.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Council Member Hanif. Council Member Brewer, would you like to ask your questions?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much. I Chair the Oversight and Investigations Committee, and there's a division there, wonderful investigators and attorneys, and they conducted observations in five Queens business advertising immigration-related services, mostly offering immigration services as part of a separate business, and they found noncompliance with City law in all five businesses, all things included, not posting the mandated signage, disclaimers, fee schedules, all wrong, and at least one business advertised it as an immigration consultant, which is absolutely prohibited by law. How can you handle, obviously this is probably very prevalent, how do you handle something like this?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Well, I think part of the partnerships that we always seek is things like this. Obviously, if anybody observes this kind of conduct, we want them to reach out to us so that we can check if it's worked out, we've already looked at these businesses, or it warrants another visit, and we can proceed with summonses, and all of that, so we are constantly just, again, the proactive inspections that I was mentioning that we're trying

to do, not just by checking for places online that may be advertising as immigration service providers, but also as our inspectors are out conducting inspections of other businesses if they identify one that falls in this category to also look and make sure that they visit and enter and address any issues that they observe.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I think, in general, our practice for our inspectors is they go in and they will have a checklist that they work off of that verifies compliance with the law. If they observe any particular violations, they will issue a summons, and that summons will be adjudicated by a judge at OATH. It's possible that these locations could have been covered in our current sweep, so if the addresses can be provided to us, we would be happy to double-check that.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I'm sure we're doing it. I know this is very common, so I just wanted to bring it to your attention that we're trying to be supportive of your efforts.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: No. Thank you, and I think, I live off of Roosevelt Avenue as well, and I see the same activity that you're

describing, and hence why communities like around
Roosevelt and other parts of our city, they need
these more proactive inspections to ensure that
illegal behavior is tampered down.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. The other
question I have is just this, the technology is so
sophisticated now, so my question is, again, I know
we don't always want to work with NYPD. I have great
respect for them, but they have thousands of people
watching the websites, as you know, like over a
thousand, so my question is to try to be proactive,
do you work with, I don't know if the AG, you know
better than I, does that. I don't know if the DA does
that. I know what they do, but I don't know if they
have that kind of capacity, so my question is, do you
work with other agencies that are constantly scouring
the web for illegal actors? Obviously, they're
looking probably for more criminal, and you're
looking for more civil, but you know, unfortunately,
they're all illegal, so my question is, what are you
doing to work with other agencies on not just
reference, but also proactively watching the web,
which is full of this kind of activity?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Yeah. No, thank you so much. We'll be doing more of that, you know, as time goes on in what we're seeing, right, with the current federal administration, because obviously, as was mentioned, during the remarks by Chair Avilés, right, we do see that people tend to, there's just more opportunity for scams when there's different administrations coming in with different approaches to our immigrant community. We work, as we mentioned, with the District Attorney's Offices and the Attorney General, and we'll continue to do that in having these discussions as well in terms of what we can do proactively with them to identify places that we should all be looking at, or, you know, instead of just reacting to a complaint that comes in.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. So, they are doing that kind of proactive web research, as far as you know?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: I don't know the specifics of how they're approaching these cases, but we definitely have the relationships now to be in touch with them and work together to address it as an issue.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: PD does. Go ahead.
I'm sorry.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: We can make
sure to follow up with all the DA's offices again,
and the AG about any type of cyber capacity they
might have.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And the
other question is, just fake, you know, keeping
websites up to date. Our information, this is more
MOIA than you, indicates, according to the brief that
we read, that's maybe not your website, but MOIA's
website is not up to date so how do you keep your
website up to date and, you know, it's hard for us
because our agencies cannot work in silos. We all
have to work together. So, I guess, like, do you look
at other agency websites because you're concerned
about consumer issues? How do we keep all of our
websites up to date so that there is information
because the public relies on them so much.

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Well, we do
definitely look at our website and we are constantly
looking to update it and put things that are relevant
or, you know, very timely in terms of cases and
what's up to date, any updates that we have to rules

and enforcement that we do in different industries.

And we do work with other agencies, and so if we observe something, we would raise it, you know, we would bring it to their attention to address and make sure that we'll keep collaborating. But it's certainly great feedback that we can bring back for just in general on addressing the issue of making sure that all of our websites are up to date.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: All right. Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Council Member.

In that vein, do you connect individuals impacted by immigration services fraud with trusted legal service providers?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: So, we do refer them to MOIA's legal assistance groups so that they can get services through them.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, I'm sorry, just for clarification, are you directing people to MOIA who is then directing people to other people?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Yes.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I would say that we use the information available on MOIA's website with respect to the legal, I forget the name of it now.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: They rebranded that one.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Support centers.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah, legal support.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Yes, that's, yes.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah, which brings a particular challenge because MOIA's website is woefully out of date. It doesn't have links that work. They refer people to ActionNYC when they rebranded it to Legal Service Center. It is a vortex mess. So, we're referring to people to get referred to other people. I would suggest you referring directly to the legal service providers.

Do you have a relationship with the legal service providers or are you simply moving everyone to MOIA?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: We know the legal service providers as well that MOIA engages with. So, perhaps something we can take under advisement of how we can more directly get people to that location if there's something wrong with the website.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: There's a lot wrong. And it's not new information, which is the incredibly irritating and responsible thing of this whole mess.

How does DCWP determine where an immigrant who's a victim of victim services fraud is directed to? So, is it to provider? When does it go to, let's say, the Office of New Americans or the AGs? What's the assessment of how you direct people?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Thank you, Chair. I want to make sure you understood correctly. And if it's not, obviously, let me know. I know you will. But I think, so if it's somebody who needs services, which I think can happen, I think both can happen, I guess, maybe is what I'm trying to say, right? If it's a case that we identify and we're like, you know what, it's not going to be much that we can do or another government agency already has an open case

related to a particular immigration service provider,
then we would suggest that that individual goes that
way. We wouldn't do it without speaking with the
individual because we're going to respect that
person's information and who they reach out to
initially. If they need services, we heard your
feedback, so we're going to be looking at that to
make sure that they are connected with a proper legal
services provider, the Office for New Americans, they
have their own hotline for similar providers, but my
understanding is that it's two separate (INAUDIBLE).
I used to oversee the Office for New Americans at the
State, I had some knowledge there, but I don't know
how they've potentially made changes. So, we
generally do go through our sister agency in the City
and, if there's other coordination, of course, we can
continue to pursue that so there's more avenues of
assistance for these New Yorkers.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Has the agency had
the experience of people calling you back and saying,
I can't get in touch with anyone, in particular,
legal service providers?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I've had
not had that experience or my team when they're

engaging with folks in outreach events or in terms of
constituent cases.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Well, would they
know where to call back?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Yes. I
would say that by accessing our team and what we do
at outreach events, it's not 3-1-1. We have direct
phone numbers to all of our team members and we also
have a general intake line that we monitor.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Great. I have that
experience all the time. If we send people to MOIA's
Legal Services, they often call back and say, no
one's calling me back, I cannot find a legal service
provider, where do we go, so I'm a little surprised
that you are not sharing that experience, but I guess
I'm glad.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I think
customer service has always been something that we've
held paramount and, in particular, my background too
is community liaison. Perhaps like an elected
official's office, I've gone through those same wars
to a certain degree and I think from my team
particularly, it's critical that we are responsive
and communicative.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. I think what it leads to is certainly nothing in your bailiwick as an agency, but the fact that we know as a City that the demands for legal service provision are significantly higher than we have been willing to invest in, like we know that is 100 percent a clear fact, so we do have a challenge of having infinitely more need than we have been willing to support so we'll continue to deal with that in our various capacities.

How does DCWP monitor immigration services for targeting New Yorkers in different languages? I guess you mentioned, Commissioner, earlier that you have staff that speak eight different languages. So, across this very vast city, how are those, I suspect it falls to those eight inspectors to kind of manage what is coming in in various languages?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: So, these are actually not inspectors. The eight that I was referring to are from our Outreach Team in terms of the education that we provide to be able to make those connections in the language that people feel

most comfortable having conversations and it also
obviously builds the trust.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it.

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA:

In terms of monitoring in various
languages, I don't think we have that data, but I
will say that part of the inspectors going out and
doing their patrols and things like that, if they
observe something, not using just English, but a
language that they may speak, because we do have a
number of capabilities also related to languages
other than English in our inspection team, they will
know those as well so it'll be part of the work that
they're doing on the field or we would have done it,
they might have a list of places because we would
have done the research ahead of sending them out to
do proactive investigations as well and that's going
to cover a number of languages also.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it. So, is the
agency able to follow up in language of whatever
language is incoming?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Yes, yes. If it's
not that somebody already speaks it, then we're very
comfortable using Language Line.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I seem to remember from our budget hearing, at least, so we have about 400 active headcount, about half of those folks speak a language other than English, and I think in total it covers close to 40 languages, if I'm not mistaken.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Can you say that one more time, you have 400 what? We have 400 active headcount, 400 people in the agency...

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Oh.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: And then half of those folks speak a language other than English and in terms of languages covered, it's about 40, I think.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it. Thank you.

In terms of, are there priorities given to certain languages or communities or fraud types? Are you seeing any shifts around that?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: No, I don't think we have any data right now to lean us in one way or another. I think we can certainly follow the trends of the languages in the city, but we don't have enough to point us one way or another.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. And I guess
a quick question in terms of the testimony, you
mentioned in the past two months that the team
conducted 750 inspections, obviously that is a very
large amount. Is that resemblance of what you do on a
monthly basis or was this a unique circumstance?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: It was a unique
circumstance, Council Member Chair Avilés. Basically,
what we do in the numerous industries that we go and
enforce different rules on is that we might look at
trends but we may look at what's happening right now.
And we know that ever since the change in
administration in Washington, this is an area where
we should focus and sort of flood this space in a
particular way and we'll continue but I don't think
it will be to that extent. Similarly, I'll give you
the example of every year we do a sweep of places
that do tax preparation when it's tax season coming
up because we want to again remind people that, okay,
this is happening, people are going to be looking for
these services so how do we address that issue? So
we'll do things like that, home improvement
contractors, a lot of work happens in the summer when
it warms up so we might like do certain focus in

different times of the year, and this was one where we decided to do a very aggressive approach to make sure that we identified all these places and can see it and then of course we will be doing follow-up, it's not that all of a sudden we're going to go from 750 to nothing but I don't think it'll be in the 750 number.

GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: Yeah, just to piggyback off, Chair, exactly what the Commissioner is saying, this is not a one and done thing. We need to look at like what are going to be the results of these adjudications so just to refresh everyone's, remember we issue summonses, they then have to be adjudicated at OATH so we don't actually get to issue the penalties directly so it has to go through the system of adjudication, and so I think once we see what the results of that are, what summonses get upheld, which businesses were out of business but we still are getting complaints about, we'll reassess as 2025 goes on and we will reallocate resources again as we look at the results of this first wave.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Got it. I'd like to recognize we've been joined by Council Member De

La Rosa and Council Member Joseph. Thank you for
being here.

In terms of, I totally get being
responsive to trends that are happening around the
city, particularly in vulnerable communities, can you
give me a sense though of like what would be the non-
flood inspection level around immigration service?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Council
Member, it's, I think it's part of what Mike was
saying earlier in terms of having to evaluate what is
occurring after this first sweep. In general,
whenever we, the way our operations, our field
enforcement happens is we have proactive inspections
that occur, we have cadences that we might put on a
particular industry, and certainly if we ever issue a
summons that is adjudicated and the party is found
guilty, that is put on a kind of a path to be re-
inspected again sooner. In terms of, I guess that's
all to say that while we're still evaluating, I think
we have to come back to you in terms of how we would,
where we expect the numbers to lie in a non-flood
scenario.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: You know, I think,
listen, we are well aware that the agency's mandate

1 is much, much bigger than the amount of staffing it
2 has been allocated, very well aware of that and, in
3 fact, I think it is irresponsible of the City to
4 continue to place mandates on an agency and starve
5 the workforce that is supposed to implement that. So,
6 you know, I think it's to recognize that you are
7 operating under severe staffing limitations and so
8 this, but it is important to understand what the
9 general cadence of the enforcement mechanism is
10 because if the field understands that this only
11 happens once a year, it operates very effectively
12 around that and we know this is a consistent issue
13 across communities across New York City. So, I guess
14 I'd love to understand a little bit more and
15 certainly even with the inspections that were done,
16 would love to understand how many of those happened
17 in my District and particular, you know, I think what
18 we see enormous fraudulent activity impacting the
19 Chinese community in particular on multiple fronts so
20 I'd love to see some more focused enforcement and
21 support in that community is particularly vulnerable
22 to fraud.

24 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: We can get
25 you the numbers for those inspections.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. Particularly because there are so many dialects and the community can be very isolated and not trusting for very valid reasons of civil entities.

So, I'd like to turn it over at this point to Council Member Hanif for her questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you so much. Commissioner Mayuga and Carlos, great to see you.

So, could you share how the current budget for immigration services fraud outreach is divvied up? I know that DCWP is supportive of my bill, Intro. 205, but the costs are what are concerning, so I'd like to know just how are you spending the funds outside of, of course, salaries on outreach materials? Is there a set number of workshops that you're conducting? Is there a set amount of resources being allocated to actual trusted service providers? Are you able to elaborate on that?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Okay. Thank you, Council Member. So our budget, I apologize because I didn't bring numbers on our outreach team for the budget specifically. We can certainly circle back with what that is. It wasn't too long ago we just testified for the budget. It's not broken down for

ISP specifically in terms of outreach. I think one of the things that we try to do when we do outreach, yes, we'll have days of action like we had recently for this specifically. And last year we were having the one on worker bill of rights, right? Once we put out that bill of rights that based on the legislation passed by this Council and we'll have another one of those coming up again closer to the summer. But, generally, our outreach will cover a number of issues, if not, general overviews of the agency because we do want people to try to understand the different things that they can come to us for, and sometimes it also obviously depends on who we're partnering with if they have a particular area of focus that we want to stress, whether it's the Libertistas, right? We're going to make sure that they know about those rules that apply to them or again, just making reference to our free taxpayer program, okay, these are the things we want you to pay attention but also know these other piece about us generally and try to get people, honestly, I try to just get people to follow us on social media because it's the way that information is received by most people, right, @helloDCWP for anybody who's

1 listening and is not following us yet, to please
2 follow us and get information that way. So, there's
3 no specific numbers in terms of outreach for ISPs
4 because it's just all of outreach, and we can get
5 back to you on what that number is.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: So like you're
8 saying like every sort of material includes a menu of
9 the services offered or the rights that...

10 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: No. We have specific
11 ones like for example, the immigration, the consumer
12 bill of rights for immigrants, right? Like that's
13 going to be one thing. There's obviously a budget
14 that was spent on that in terms of photocopies and
15 distribution of that. I just don't have the numbers
16 in front of me.

17 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I would say
18 in terms of the outreach team wise, it's just five
19 folks on that team. We don't have like particular
20 contracts necessarily with providers that facilitate
21 outreach. All the outreach we do is our own with our
22 partners in the communities and then we do have
23 literature that we've developed that it did have a
24 cost and we update periodically. We have our consumer
25 tip book for immigrants. We have a consumer bill of

rights for immigration service providers. So that's kind of all existing in-house and we can figure out the numbers for you there.

In terms of this bill, 205, which we are supportive of, I anticipate and I think your essential staff should have these numbers already, but it's about 1.7 million we would anticipate in new budget. That is around 680,000, that is new staff. In particular, an outreach coordinator, somebody to develop contacts with ethnic media channels, for example, procurement for the advertising campaign, two folks to work on complaint intake systems and reporting analysis to help guide our eventual reporting as well as enforcement. And then...

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And how many people would that be?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: That's five people.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Additional five?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: That's an additional five, yes.

And then in terms of the OTPS for the advertising campaign, we anticipate based on the prescription that is in the bill that that's close,

upwards of a million dollars. With TV ads alone being around 500,000, if we want to also consider subway ads, bus shelters, all these things, I think that's where the OTPS would land if the bill would be passed as is. I think for that reason, we've wanted to highlight that these are budget realities that we have to face so I think we're supportive of the bill and want to talk through these real numbers with you all as we negotiate this in redlining.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: No. Absolutely, and I appreciate that because you all are already doing incredible work to get the word out at a time when we've got fraudsters preying on our community, which is a longstanding issue, and then you've got the federal administration and our top leaders also targeting our community and detaining them, deporting them without due process. And we have to talk about those issues as something that we're going to see far more of an uptick with and a normalization of like that this is normal, that yeah, immigrant communities, because the federal administration thinks what you said or what you think isn't fine by our rules, you're not going to be allowed in our country anymore, and I think our city has a distinct

and unique role to play in this particular political moment, which is why I want to push for the additional funding to be something that is seriously considered because of the ways in which people are isolating and are experiencing a different level of fear that's not just as they're trying to get their citizenship status done or reunited with their family members.

For the five outreach folks that are on the team, what are their roles?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Well, we've broken up that team's kind of ambit to focus on kind of turf areas that they cover. The turfs really are focused partly a little bit on where they live, but also their language capacity as well. I think both of those things help them facilitating outreach, both in the mornings and the evenings and weekends.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And it's like street outreach, like what's the?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: So, my preference usually is for folks to be able to do presentations or remarks to captive audiences. We'll go to your monthly meeting, we'll go to a tenant association meeting, things like that. The second

1
2 preference I would have then is probably canvassing,
3 direct outreach, like meeting folks at high transit
4 subway hubs, engaging with them with our literature,
5 our worker bill of rights, our consumer tip booklet.
6 And then also we do high visibility events like
7 tabling, for example. So, I kind of rank order that
8 outreach and that sort of priority myself. I think
9 it's a way for us to really have dedicated time with
10 New Yorkers because again, to reiterate, I think the
11 work that we do is incredibly essential for folks
12 living in New York City.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: And then alongside
14 the street canvassing and the presentations, is there
15 like a set of community leaders that the team is
16 meeting with on a regular basis, or is there like a
17 round table that happens with trusted immigration
18 service providers, and what kinds of digital media
19 and PSAs has DCWP engaged in to get the word out?

20 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Thank you. Yes, so I
21 think Mixteca is still here, and I know that recently
22 I went and spoke with community leaders from the
23 organization. That was really exciting to talk to
24 them because it's like, okay, I'm going to give you
25 the tools and they become sort of ambassadors, right,

of all this information that is correct information to share with their community, so we do things like that. I mentioned a round table we did recently with organizations, especially to talk about immigration service providers, and we do plan to continue doing those in a quarterly basis so that we can continue engaging and re-evaluating and making sure it's like, okay, what is it, what's going on, what are we seeing, any changes that we should be making or consider any issues that we're seeing, so we'll plan to continue doing that. In terms of social media, sometimes we partner also with organizations on Facebook Live events, to provide information. So, we'll broadcast those as well and continue. We do have a digital campaign that's been ongoing for the last month or so specific to immigration service providers so we'll do things like that as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Got it. And then how are you assessing how the agency is doing in terms of outreach? Like, is there a sort of, do you guys have deliverables that you're like, we have to meet this objective?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Yes. Carlos' team is quite amazing. I mean, they do have targets that

1 they'll share with me to make sure that we're all
2 aligned on how many presentations we're aiming to
3 complete. We look at prior year numbers and see how
4 we can either surpass that or meet it or adjust
5 depending on how successful we were or make any
6 particular changes we might need to make. In terms of
7 social media, we can certainly see followers. If it's
8 like on our website, you can see how many clicks
9 there are and things like that. So, we do track
10 things in a way that we believe will be helpful for
11 us to assess whether we were successful or not and
12 how it informs what we do in the future.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: Thank you. And then
15 my final question is, could you just describe the
16 relationship of DCWP and MOIA on this issue? And I
17 know that there's the referral process, but how else
18 are you two agencies engaging?

19 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Thank you. Yes, we
20 work together with them. Certainly, one of the main
21 issues here will be to obviously refer individuals to
22 the providers that are accessible through MOIA. We've
23 heard the issues with the website, so we're going to
24 be working on that to make sure that we're checking
25 to make sure that individuals do receive the guidance

that they need, and certainly when we're doing outreach and education is another area where we collaborate with them. Obviously, especially we're trying to target the immigrant population, they're going to be strong partners with us as well.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Yeah, I'd say MOIA, we collaborate on a number of events together. You know, as recently as that day of action last week, MOIA contributed a number of volunteers to help staff locations, but also with the language capacity. There are the referrals that you refer complaints to us as we refer folks to their services as well. I think on the advocacy level, we're in constant discussions too about what's happening across the country. So, they've definitely been close partners with us in this space.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: On that piece, the advocacy around the state and Fed, could you just describe what's going on and any updates? And then I'll...

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Well, I think the particular... I'm sorry.

COUNCIL MEMBER HANIF: No, go ahead.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I'm sorry. I think at that particular moment that comes to mind of where we had discussions with respect to our free tax prep program and what we should be communicating out to folks about filing their taxes in this particular moment. I think we have guidance up on our website now. Any first time ITIN filers should really meet with the legal service provider first, for example, and that's some of the work that we're doing ourselves to make sure that communications are clear between our agencies on that issue.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. Thank you. A couple more questions, and then I'm going to turn it back over to a couple of Colleagues who have questions. Earlier when you were answering a question by Chair Avilés, Commissioner, you mentioned that you're directing people to MOIA. Since MOIA refuses to be here, how do we know what those outcomes are of those referrals?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: We can certainly get those outcomes and bring them back to you and share them with you. Is it specific about people who reach out and get referrals?

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Yeah. Because I mean, if you're referring people directly to MOIA, we don't then know what the outcome is. We don't know if people are having their issues answered. We don't know how the agency is responding. It's like we're dealing with a black box because they're refusing to be here today. So, I mean, it's pretty insane that we now have to rely on you to get an answer from MOIA, but that is what it is.

Are you following up with victims of fraud? Like, what's the agency followup? So, if someone has been victimized by an immigration service provider, then what type of followup are you having directly with the victims?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Well, we certainly do a lot of communication with them in terms of questions that we may have to assess the case and how far we can take the investigation to make sure that we get the information that we feel is necessary to move the investigation forward. And, of course, making sure that then they are receiving the services that they need from a legitimate source.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: And in the past few
Fiscal Years, how many cases of fraud does DCWP
receive from MOIA?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I don't
think we have for the past few Fiscal Years. I know
in my communications with MOIA that I've received,
MOIA and OASO, this year at least four. Last year, I
think, a similar number as well.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Those are
Calendar Years. I'm sorry.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. Thank you. I
understand Council Member Joseph has some questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Thank you, Chairs.
Quick question around Protecting Immigrant New
Yorkers Task Force. Does DCWP and MOIA still meet
with members of this task? If not, would it be
helpful for the task force to reconvene?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: We participate in
the PINY Task Force.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: How many meetings
have you've had so far this year?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: The PINY Task Force is, I think it's a separate organization. They've had two meetings, I believe, this year.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And you've attended the meetings and shared resources with them?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Yes. I mean, I think we've been a part of the PINY Task Force since I started the agency almost nine years ago.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: With this landscape right now, with the federal effective, how does DCWP handle immigration service fraud cases with the landscape changing every minute because everything is something new. What we knew today is not what's happening tomorrow so how are you handling that on the ground?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: As soon as we get a complaint, one of the things that we were sharing earlier is that our team knows to refer it to an attorney so that we can look into it further without doing outreach to the business right away because our experience is that they'll disappear as long as they get outreach from a government agency so we want to be very strategic about it so that's one way that

we're working with it. Obviously, we want to do more education. It's part of the reason we're supportive of the bill to get more outreach done so that individuals know to come forward and let us know of anything that they're seeing. And then at the same time, as our inspectors are out conducting their field work, if they identify also other issues, they will bring them back for us to make an assessment and see if it warrants a different approach.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Since January of 2025 until today, how many complaints have you received?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: I think it's eight. Eight complaints.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: And how do you go about, I wasn't here for the beginning of the meeting, sorry about that, but how do you go about when you receive a complaint, what are the steps that you take?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Go ahead.

GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: So, as the Commissioner mentioned, Council Member, if a complaint comes in through 3-1-1 or DCWP's own portal, it goes to our Consumer Services Unit, which

1 is our intake unit for consumer complaints and, for
2 this category, all the immigration service provider
3 complaints go to a lawyer who will assess the
4 complaint, see if we have enough information to
5 pursue an investigation, reach out to any contact
6 provided with the case and also determine whether
7 this is a complaint that while there are facts, would
8 be better handled by another agency like a District
9 Attorney's Office or the Attorney General. One thing
10 we were talking about earlier was that we are
11 redoubling our efforts to have good relationships
12 with the five District Attorney's Office, with the
13 Attorney General so, if we think this might be part
14 of a bigger criminal investigation, we know that we
15 can send it there. And likewise, the District
16 Attorneys can send us stuff if it's something that's
17 more ripe for civil enforcement.

18
19 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Is any of these
20 cases ever involved in NYPD?

21 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: No. I mean, not in
22 recent memory.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER JOSEPH: Okay. Thank you,
24 Chairs.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. We'd like to acknowledge we were joined by Council Member Krishnan.

I'd like to follow up on the task force. I want to make sure that we're talking about the same task force. So, the PINY Task Force is being convened. Who sits at that table and who's convening it?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Well, from our team, it's our Director of Community Affairs and some attorneys from Mike's team that would join those meetings. I think there are, when I've gone to those meetings, there've been representatives from the District Attorney's Offices. I think ONA had a representative as well. I think we're talking about the same PINY Task Force that was convened by NYIC for many years. I know, in most recent months, they're rethinking how they want to operate and like in terms of agenda setting and having certain chairs and vice chairs, and I think that's been kind of what's taken up the agenda for most initial meetings, but they have further meetings that are coming down the line that I think will be quarterly that, of course, we will continue participating in and making

sure our staff is available with information and
updates on our end.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, who's driving
it in particular, like is it ONA or?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I thought
it was NYIC. I feel a little bit weird maybe talking
about it when it's not ours, but...

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: It's not yours,
yeah.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I can find
out for sure.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: But you are
participating.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: But we are
there for sure.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, you can speak
to what is happening there. We'll follow up,
obviously. It's not your task force, but you are
there.

In terms of, let's see, I just wanted to
follow up on, I'm sorry if I missed this. Can you
note just for the record like what the outreach, I
may be conflating these things, so your budget may be

different, but the outreach and like education,
campaign part of your budget is what?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: I don't
think we didn't have a particular number with respect
to our campaign, our current OTPS for campaigns in
general. I will say that we have five staff members
on our team that currently do outreach. And then with
respect to Introduction 205, if it were to advance, I
think we'd anticipate that being about 1.7 million.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, the 1.7
million includes the five FTE?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: No. So, I'm
sorry. The 1.7 million would be another five FTE
outside of the five I'm mentioning. So, we currently
have five outreach folks, and then for this bill, we
have a request for five FTE.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I understand. But
outside of the FTE though, obviously purchasing
digital ads, doing all that manner of work requires
resources. Is there an allocated budget for printing
flyers and doing digital outreach?

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: You mean currently?

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Correct.

2 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: We do. That's what I
3 was saying. I don't have the number in front of me.
4 We had it like for the budget hearing, and we just
5 didn't bring it today, but it's easy to share. Yes.

6 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. And you
7 mentioned that you also receive cases from the
8 District Attorney.

9 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: Yeah, we could. We
10 haven't recently, but again, we've really doubled
11 down on sort of rekindling those relationships,
12 making sure we have that dialogue. And these are
13 conversations we've been having since the beginning
14 of 2025. So, we're hopeful that if District Attorneys
15 find something that's really more prone for civil
16 enforcement, which may happen for a variety of
17 reasons, they have our contact, they have my email,
18 they have my colleagues' emails, and they can reach
19 out to us. We're hopeful that will bear fruit as we
20 proceed in 2025.

21 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. And in terms
22 of, I guess I'd like to know from your perspective,
23 what are the tools that you think you need in order
24 to maximize this work, to address this issue, or
25 address many of these issues.

2 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Yes, yes. I really
3 think when it comes to immigration service providers,
4 we just really need people to come forward. We really
5 struggle getting complaints in so that we can look
6 into them. And then from there, really have a better
7 sense of where we're getting stuck in terms of moving
8 an investigation forward. But we really have a hard
9 time getting individuals to let us know what's
10 happened to them quickly because, as we said, and I
11 know that all of you know this as well, these fly-by-
12 night operations are very difficult to catch,
13 especially if there's too much time that goes from
14 the moment that the action took place to the moment
15 that we find out about it and get enough information
16 to move it forward. So, I'll start with that. I'll
17 pass it over to Mike Tiger for follow up.

18 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: Yeah. I agree with
19 everything the Commissioner said, of course. But
20 also, this really isn't all hands-on deck. I think we
21 all recognize this from all the different government
22 stakeholders that we should be working together, and
23 so I think the biggest thing is beyond even
24 resources, beyond what's going on in individual
25 investigations, building the sustained trusting

relationships in different communities, and that's where the Council and individual members can really be invaluable and your staff can be invaluable in building that rapport, sending people to us that we can build up investigations. This was mentioned before, but we actually had a successful case in the Horizonte case at OATH last year, and we worked hand in hand with Council Member Won's staff to build up that case, and that was very helpful so I think if we all work together, I think that is like the most important thing to just have that constant drum beat to build up the trust so people can provide complaints that we can do investigations and it becomes a virtuous cycle.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, in terms of the timeframe or from the moment of notification or are you providing summonses on the spot when you walk in and you see all this stuff, you give them a summons. From that time to potentially OATH, what's the length of time that that normally takes?

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: Yeah. I don't have those numbers with exactitude right in front of me, but it can take months. It takes months typically for the time between a summons is issued

and then it's ultimately adjudicated OATH. And of course, businesses have the opportunity to seek adjournments. They sometimes default and are able to vacate the defaults and it gets put back on a calendar. And that's not an immigration specific issue. That's just the way that items are adjudicated generally. So, I can't give an exact number of like, oh, in this case, it'll be definitely this amount of months before we get something that's finally resolved. Once something is actually heard in the Hearings Division at OATH, businesses also have the right to appeal within OATH to their Appeals Unit. So from the time we actually have a final adjudication that can actually be collected upon, a summons that has issued penalties, it can take a big chunk of the year.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. I think that the nature of the challenge that we're facing here, when you see upon return, most of them have up and left. We're not going to be able to draw enforcement in a real way if cases drag on. Obviously, we always support due process and we want that due process. But do you have any recommendations around how we can

speed up that process to ensure there is actual
accountability and people are following the law?

GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: I think that's
something that we want to give a little more thought
to. I think it's definitely a systemic issue. That is
a challenge that we have experienced throughout the
years. I don't want to give an ad hoc recommendation
right now, but I think you raise a very real concern,
Council Member, and I think we can talk internally
and discuss whether we have more concrete
recommendations for the Committee.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Great. Do you have
any last-minute questions?

Okay. I think we may have, give it one
last look before you're off the hook.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That rhymed.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I know, I'm
talented. Hold on one second.

Okay. Just one thing that continues to
arise, and I think this is related to some earlier
questioning. Is DCWP tracking any fraudulent websites
that are popping up relevant to someone's immigration
case, such as fraudulent websites that maybe mimic
the Department of Justice?

2 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: I don't think we
3 have a systemic list that we're developing, but the
4 issue that you're raising, we are familiar with. And
5 if we see, obviously, if we get a tip or a complaint
6 that focuses on a certain site, we'll start to
7 develop that list and that'll be in our files, but we
8 don't have a systemic list of all sites that are
9 mimicking government sites.

10 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. When you
11 actually search for USCIS, the second search is a
12 fraudulent site that mimics exactly that site. It is
13 a huge problem.

14 COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Is this the one
15 that's mentioned in the report that just has like
16 periods in between, or no periods in between?

17 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: I don't remember,
18 I don't recall, but this site has been noted by legal
19 service providers across the board, particularly with
20 all these mandates that are coming from the federal
21 government and also the new scams of people receiving
22 direct emails, receiving correspondence through mail
23 that says they should be deporting themselves. Is
24 that something that has come to the awareness of the
25 agency?

2 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: I mean, I think
3 we're publicly aware of that. We haven't gotten
4 individual complaints about it, but we are aware, we
5 read the same reports that you have seen. But, again,
6 if any of your constituents faces that and has like
7 an actual letter that they can forward to us, that
8 always will be helpful?

9 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah.

10 ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: There are a
11 few community-based organizations that have raised
12 this question of the information coming out to self-
13 deport, and that's a conversation we're having with
14 them as well off the back of our round table we had
15 the other week.

16 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: So, in the
17 instance of this particular website that is clearly
18 fraudulent and very, very dangerous, how does the
19 agency begin to try to address this issue?

20 GENERAL COUNSEL TIGER: I mean, it's
21 definitely something we're looking at, and that's why
22 of course we're engaging with all the other
23 regulatory stakeholders in the city. That's something
24 we can talk with those partners about what's the best
25 approach. It can be a challenge to take down

fraudulent websites. It's something that we deal with in different subject matter areas that we regulate. But it's definitely a real harm, and we recognize that. And definitely, it's something we're thinking about and thinking about with partners about the best way to approach.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay. I guess with that, obviously we have a ton of work to do. I thank you for your time and being here in the work that you do. I would just continue to encourage proactive enforcement. What is clear is severe noncompliance with our laws across the city, and I hope our City will continue to invest in this agency's capacity to maximize its work and protect New York City residents because immigrants and non-immigrants alike, that is what the work of the agency is so thank you.

COMMISSIONER MAYUGA: Thank you so much.

ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER ORTIZ: And we'll continue to have folks monitor the hearing as well.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you.

And now we will open for public testimony. I remind the members of the public that this is a government proceeding and that decorum

shall be observed at all times. As such, members of
the public shall remain silent at all times.

The witness table is reserved for people
who wish to testify. No video recording or
photography is allowed from the witness table.
Further, members of the public may not present audio,
video recordings as testimony but may submit
transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant-at-
Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

If you wish to speak at today's hearing,
please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant-
at-Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized,
you will have two minutes to speak on today's
oversight hearing topic, Combating Immigration
Services Fraud, or on the legislation on today's
hearing agenda, Introduction 205, Introduction 980.

If you have a written statement or
additional written testimony you wish to submit for
the record, please provide a copy of that testimony
to the Sergeant-at-Arms. You may also email written
testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72
hours of the close of this hearing. Audio and video
recordings will not be accepted.

The following languages are available for interpretation, English, Spanish, Mandarin, and Haitian Creole.

For in-person panelists, please come up to the table once your name has been called. Now I will call our first in-person panel. Madeleine, Hildalyn, Luisana, Amavilia, and Jorge.

Okay. And we've also been joined by Council Member Bottcher.

Good afternoon. Would you like to start?

LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Good afternoon, members of the Council. I am a member of La Colmena. It's an organization for immigrants' rights in Staten Island. Today, I wish to not share my name, but it is important to raise my voice about what's happening in my community. At this moment, I feel a huge fear, and I feel the fear amongst people, in regards to the new registry of immigration, and the risk of deportation, and how our lives could be in a detention center.

LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: For this reason, I'm very grateful with La Colmena, because it's a very trustworthy source of support.

2 LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

3 INTERPRETER: And they're doing everything
4 that's possible to respond to questions and to guide
5 the community amongst so much uncertainty.

6 LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

7 INTERPRETER: I support the projects
8 Intro. 0205 and Intro. 0980.

9 LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

10 INTERPRETER: Because these can protect
11 immigrants to not fall into the hands of dishonest
12 actors.

13 LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

14 INTERPRETER: Please continue pushing
15 these initiatives in favor of the immigrant
16 community.

17 LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

18 INTERPRETER: And do not forget La
19 Colmena.

20 LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

21 INTERPRETER: Because it does need a
22 strong support in Staten Island.

23 LUISANA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

24 INTERPRETER: Thank you for your time.

25

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
LANGUAGE)

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Dear Members of the Council,
I am a member of Mixteca, and I come today to testify
in regards to the abuse and injustices I have
suffered from an immigration attorney.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I have lived in the U.S. for
more than 25 years.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And I have been looking for
documentation for several years because I wanted to
be part of this community.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: With a formal status.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: However, I've been looking
for an attorney for several years, someone who can
help me and my husband.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And on February of 2024, I
did find a lawyer who told me he could help me with
my military parole.

1
2 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

3 INTERPRETER: Because my son was in the
4 Marines.

5 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

6 INTERPRETER: And several attorneys had
7 already said that I had no case.

8 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

9 INTERPRETER: However, this attorney
10 promised me that he could help.

11 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

12 INTERPRETER: But when it was time to sign
13 the agreement.

14 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

15 INTERPRETER: They didn't offer
16 translation.

17 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

18 INTERPRETER: And because of need.

19 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

20 INTERPRETER: Because I needed it, I
21 signed it without confirming.

22 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

23 INTERPRETER: So later on during the
24 process, the attorney treated us in a horrible way.

25 AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And he only took part of our
money.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: The first incident happened
on December 18 of 2024.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: When I requested an update
on my status of adjustment.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And he told me that I had to
present a medical exam.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I told him I was receiving
chemotherapy.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And that I was having
trouble getting the medical exam certified.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: However, I had not been
informed of this request beforehand.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And when I asked him why he
had taken so long.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

1

2

INTERPRETER: In presenting my request.

3

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

4

INTERPRETER: Mr. Leonard Hecht.

5

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

6

INTERPRETER: Started shouting at me.

7

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

8

INTERPRETER: He threw our papers to the

9

floor.

10

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

11

INTERPRETER: And started screaming at us

12

that we didn't know what he was already doing for us.

13

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

14

INTERPRETER: Then he threw us out of the

15

office.

16

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

17

INTERPRETER: And my husband, Enrique

18

Pastor, witnessed this mistreatment.

19

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

20

INTERPRETER: His assistant, who's, I only

21

know him by the name, Larry.

22

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

23

INTERPRETER: Intervened and spoke with

24

him.

25

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And later on, Mr. Hecht left
the office and he did apologize for his behavior.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: We came back on January 9th
of 2025.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: To do a followup on my case.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And sometime before, during
the process, we had agreed that I would pay 6,500
dollars.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: For the whole adjustment of
the status.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: But he had said that I would
only need to pay 3,000 dollars to present the
request.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: So that same day he called
us.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: So he called us to the
office and said he would not pay, he would not

present the request until I would pay the total
amount of 6,000 dollars.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: When I questioned the sudden
change in disagreement.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: He got irritated, he started
complaining.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And he told us that this
country did not want us because we were too ignorant
and poor.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: He seemed frustrated.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: He was telling us he was
just trying to protect us.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And he started raising his
voice, accusing us.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Of not wanting to pay him.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: So, I asked for someone who
would speak Spanish there.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And he asked me why if I had
been living here for 25 years I did not speak
English.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I requested an interpreter
again.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And he told us that his
parents knew seven languages.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And, again, he questioned,
he asked me why I didn't know English.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And he said that unless I
gave him all of the money, he wouldn't bring me an
interpreter.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I told him I didn't want to
continue the case with him.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And he said that I needed to
pay the whole amount of 6,000 dollars.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: So, at first he didn't want
to return the documents.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: So, on Wednesday, March 26,
I called again to ask for my documents.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And with Larry's help, he
said we could pick them up.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: But he left it very clear
that he wouldn't return any money.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: We paid a total of 3,500
dollars.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And he never presented our
request.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: This whole process affected
me too much.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Because I was also in the
middle of chemotherapy.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: My mental and emotional
health.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: My mental and emotional
health really took a fall because at some point I had
the hope that I would get my documentation. And at
the end I just lost 3,000 dollars.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: We have worked too hard to
have a dignified life here in the U.S.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: And it's unfair that they
abuse and treat us like this.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: That's why I present my
testimony today so that the Council will pass the
laws that will benefit our community.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: The immigrant community that
helps this city so much.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Thank you for your time.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
LANGUAGE)

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Okay.

AMAVILIA: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
LANGUAGE) Thank you.

MADELEINE BRAVO: Thank you. Good
afternoon, Chair and Council Members. My name is
Madeleine Bravo, and I am the Legal Services
Coordinator at La Colmena, an immigrant rights
organization proudly rooted in Staten Island. At La
Colmena, we hold regular community sessions to hear
directly from our community, listening to their fears
and questions. With the support of our trusted
consultant attorneys, we also offer consultations to
provide accurate, reliable information. Too often,
our community comes to us after encountering
misinformation, especially online and through word of
mouth. In some cases, community members have paid
over 3,000 dollars and have been misled by
individuals claiming to be attorneys, claiming that
they can offer a sped-up citizenship process, going

as far as creating fake USCIS documents, and impersonating judges. More recently, we've seen people arriving at our doors with deportation notices or unsure how to navigate the new immigrant registry requirements. These situations create fear and confusion and, in that confusion, people become vulnerable to exploitation. We are gravely concerned that predatory actors will exploit this vulnerability, preying on our community by offering false promises and charging outrageous fees, putting people's future at serious risk. This is why we fully support Intro. 0205 and Intro. 0980. These measures are critical to protect our immigrant communities from fraud and abuse. We urge this Council to continue standing with us and to never forget Staten Island, and thank you for your time and for your commitment to justice.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much. We will not forget La Colmena and Staten Island.

HILDALYN COLON: Good morning. My name is Hildalyn Colon, and I'm the Deputy Director of New Immigrant Community Empowerment, NICE, located in Jackson Heights, Queens. I want to bring another perspective that I think that we have talked on is

1 the importance of this type of legislation, but I
2 think the example of the person or one of our members
3 show that this is a gentleman that have a license
4 that is behave this way and treat this person this
5 way. So, part of the legislation that we put in here,
6 and that I hope that you guys approve, is putting
7 everybody under the same bar. Part of the biggest
8 challenges that we see are not what I think some of
9 what describe is that we are challenging with non-
10 profit organizations that represent themselves and
11 provide legal services even that they're not DOJ
12 accredited, or they don't have a lawyer and a
13 guidance, which I will tell you, for non-profit like
14 us, it becomes a nightmare. Because what the members
15 in the community are feeling is, but that community
16 organization told me yes, and you tell me no. And I
17 have a person here sitting next to me that go through
18 the same process, as we have a similar offering in
19 NICE. We have open, and I will speak to both of us,
20 that organizations like us have open legal services
21 provided under the guidance of an attorney because of
22 the need because we cannot offer everything, and I
23 think part of the issue is that the need for us to
24 provide in different levels of immigration. I think
25

1 that is one of the key things that we see here. The
2 other issue that I want to raise is the part that we
3 need to have examples. I know Vilda and I know DCWP,
4 but the cases that they come forward have never come
5 to the press, have not seen. Part of the community,
6 and this is from my years of experience of actually
7 prosecuting immigration fraud in the DA's office, is
8 that communities need to see that when I come
9 forward, works. And that is part of the problem that
10 we have seen lately. I will tell you from my
11 experience, it cannot be the color of the day. This
12 issue about immigration fraud has to be a continuous
13 process, not only one time.

15 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you,
16 Hildalyn. I just want to make sure, just for clarity,
17 you're suggesting that there's bad actors both in the
18 for-profit space and the non-profit space. I would
19 assume they're all held to the same standard. There
20 are legal ways and requirements. I just want to make
21 sure I'm understanding what you're saying.

22 HILDALYN COLON: Well, I think there's an
23 issue, right? Immigration law is a federal issue,
24 right, and in order to provide organizations like us
25 and others, especially non-profits, the goal here is

1 that we become DOJ accredited. This is how a person
2 that, and I'm going to use an example, as a
3 coordinator, right, we need the guidance of an
4 immigration attorney to provide legal advice. In the
5 pathway, what we're trying to do is funding
6 organizations like us to address that path because
7 that's how you take some of the bad actors of the
8 non-profits to operate in this wiggle room, I'm
9 helping, but I'm providing immigration services, but
10 I'm doing this. I think that's one of the things that
11 all non-profits that wants to get into this field as
12 a level basic, we need to get to DOJ accredited
13 because that's kind of like having a license. The
14 other thing that we haven't discussed but that I will
15 recommend from my experience, we need to get all
16 these people that are providing in New York City
17 immigration services registered. Right now, DCWP
18 cannot ask you, you can't even answer, how many are
19 out there because they have something to lose and
20 they did the same approach with the employment
21 agencies. They forced them to register. They need to
22 cost them. We need to get them out there because I
23 will tell you, we provide services in the epicenter
24 of fraud land. Jackson Heights, Roosevelt Avenue, my
25

1 God, you can see anything that you can think of. And
2 the thing is that if you don't force them to come out
3 and there's some kind of registration, like it's not
4 going to happen. We need to figure out a way, how do
5 we deal with the bad actors? The lawyers have the bar
6 to basically to deal with them, but then this
7 organization, non-profits, right now they're in limbo
8 and it's a misguidance because we're here to help
9 you. This is where the wiggle room starts to unfold.
10 I don't know if that answered your question.
11

12 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah, no, it
13 definitely helps. I think the struggle is capacity
14 and ensuring that we're arming everyone with
15 sufficient capacity to be able to provide.

16 HILDALYN COLON: But I think I will tell
17 you, and this is capacity can be divided. I think
18 that part of the process that it was lacking here in
19 this issue is that there are some cases that could
20 receive by non-profits instead of like the Catholic
21 Migration Services. I think we have to determine who
22 need a representation or who is not. And I think
23 right now part of the biggest challenge right now
24 that we are foreseeing is that everybody's doing
25 their immigration case on pro se base because nobody

can represent you. Asylum cases take at least 10 years. So, it's rarely who's going to be with you for so long. That is part of the process.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. Got it. Thank you. And thank you around the suggestion of registration. I think this goes to like so many different issues. I appreciate the testimony. Thank you.

Jorge.

JORGE PAZ-REYES: Good afternoon, Council Members. Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Jorge Paz-Reyes and I'm the Community Organizer at Mixteca, a community-based organization located in Sunset Park. We serve both the immigrant community and we have been over a decade in the area. I'm here with community partners from La Colmena, NICE, as well as community members from these organizations to express the importance of combat immigration fraud. At Mixteca, we offer a range of social and legal services to immigrant families, and actually, we were DOJ accredited recently. Their support is invaluable, but the lack of constant on-site legal counsel still represents a barrier, underscoring the urgent need to better

educate and protect the community. I want to kind of second what Hildalyn said here of the importance of bringing visibility to the issues that have happened and also creating a space that is safe for community members to present these cases and talk about it. I think when we found out there was going to be this hearing, we did a little bit of a campaign within Mixteca to talk to different community members and we got a lot of people come forward talking about the immigration fraud. However, it was really challenging to get them here to testify. There is a fear of immigration, of persecution. A lot of them do not want to share their names. And also, kind of goes right now, this recommendation that when we present things like that, we shouldn't have cameras on community members because unfortunately, this is the climate that we have right now. I wanted to talk specifically about a community member that was victim of fraud, especially within this fraud of VAWA. So VAWA is a pathway for serving survivors of domestic violence to apply for immigration relief. Without relying on their abusing, this is a critical protection, but in the wrong hands, it can be very fraudulent and it could be harmful. We had a

community member that spent over 27,000 dollars. The family and the community members currently seeking mental health at Mixteca, and we're providing all the supports because it has devastated her, and her only support system is her son and her son was accused of abusing her. So, at the interview with immigration, she had to tell the truth. She had to tell that the lawyer actually was lying and she was denied the opportunity. However, this case wouldn't have become so important in attention if it hadn't been covered by the news. This was very related to a Bronx lawyer that had done this for years, thousands of cases. That's why here at Mixteca, with La Colmena, NICE, we're kind of bringing this perspective of a small, mid-sized community organizations and the importance of creating pathways and laws such as 205 and 980 to make sure that we're protecting the community. Thank you so much and we really urge for you guys to pass this bill. Have a great day.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Jorge. And we just want to thank all of you, La Colmena, Mixteca, NICE, for all the work that you are doing under some pretty difficult circumstances because you hold both the heart and the challenges that our

community is facing while it's actively being
attacked by the federal government so thank you for
the work that you're doing and thank you for your
testimony.

The next panel is going to be Nick
Gulotta and Deborah Lee and Christian.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: And just as they're
coming up, I just want to take a moment to recognize
we've been joined in the balcony by Empowering Our
Families Initiative Youth Leadership Institute, thank
you so much for joining, and Pearls and Ivy
Foundation Scholars. We're so happy that you're all
here with us today.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Nick, if you'd
like to start.

And we are adding Natalia Nuñez to this
panel.

NICK GULOTTA: Thank you, Chairs Avilés
and Menin for being champions on this issue. My name
is Nick Gulotta and, while I serve as the Chief-of-
Staff to Council Member Julie Won, I'm here to
testify in my personal capacity as someone who's
worked on this issue for many years and as the former

Director of Outreach and Organizing for the Mayor's
Office of Immigrant Affairs, MOIA.

As the federal government implements
cruel anti-immigrant policies and eliminates critical
consumer protections, New York City can step up to
protect immigrants by passing Intros 980 and 205.
With every new executive order, New Yorkers are
targeted with scams, false promises, and misleading
claims. Signage, flyers, palm cards, and digital ads
from notarios that are meant to trick immigrants to
believing that they are seeking assistance from an
attorney have never been more brazenly advertised
than they are today. The current civil penalty for an
ISP for improper advertisements or engaging in
prohibited conduct is a mere 3,500 dollars for a
first violation. That amounts to a slap on the wrist.
The going rate for a single asylum application can be
as high as 5,000 dollars on Roosevelt Avenue. Intro.
980 doubles DCWP's current penalty schedule, raising
the minimum penalty to 7,500 for a first violation
and going up to 20,000 for repeat violations. This is
a critical step to make examples and deter bad actors
who seek to take advantage of New Yorkers. Council
Member Hanif's Intro. 205 expands and makes essential

and well-considered updates to Local Law 63 of 2017.

But it's also necessary that MOIA and DCWP conduct meaningful ISP fraud-specific outreach. The sort of all-inclusive outreach tactics, like including a message about ISP fraud in a 30-minute Know Your Rights presentation or in a flyer with a list of other resources, while important, are not a replacement for a dedicated outreach campaign that Intro. 205 requires. Historically, the City has had a complaint-driven approach to investigating notarial (TIMER CHIME) fraud, and I'll wrap up, but the evidence of deceptive business practices are in plain view in our communities. We can start by requiring a minimum number of annual and educational visits and inspections to the thousands of businesses with the words notario or multi-services in their names. And similar proactive investigations can be done on digital ads over Facebook, WeChat, WhatsApp. Would also just like to mention that we'd highly recommend a sort of worst landlord's watchlist approach to inform New Yorkers about bad actors and popular scams for DCWP's website. And I'm happy to answer any questions.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much.

No, I think that's a great idea. I like to call it the shame list. Yeah, no, very good idea. And I think also Hildalyn's point of really advertising and letting folks know, not only can claims result in positive response to the community, but that we are there doing that work is really important to send the message that we are standing with people and we're standing against these fraudulent issues. I also just thank you. I think the minimum number of investigations is definitely something we should pursue because as you saw, the agency seems to have a slapdash response so thank you for your testimony.

JORGE PAZ-REYES: Thank you so much. And I'll just say, I think that they do an incredible job at being responsive to complaints when they get them. But if we're relying on people to come forward despite the stigma, despite the risks, we're never really going to address this issue in its full form so I would highly recommend a minimal number.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Yeah. I'd agree with that. Certainly not to say that they're not doing anything. They are responding, but there is a serious shame that is connected to the experience of

1 having been victimized by fraudsters that I don't
2 think we discussed at all. We should have discussed
3 how we address the shame and stigma around that. But
4 these are all interim important measures that we
5 should be pursuing, including the legislation so
6 thank you for your work.
7

8 JORGE PAZ-REYES: Thank you.

9 NATALIA NUÑEZ BARRAGÁN: Good afternoon,
10 Members of the Council. My name is Natalia Nuñez
11 Barragán. I'm the Senior Manager of Membership and
12 Capacity Building at Immigrant ARC. Immigrant ARC is
13 a coalition of over 80 legal services providers
14 delivering service across the New York State. Our
15 mission is to increase access to legal justice and
16 legal counsel for immigrants New Yorkers by
17 mobilizing legal service provider and addressing
18 systemic barriers to justice. Immigrant ARC applauds
19 the New York City Council's work to combat
20 immigration services fraud, whereby unscrupulous
21 individuals who are neither licensed attorneys or
22 accredited representative. These prey upon those
23 needing legitimate legal services by misrepresenting
24 the natural service they are qualified to provide.
25 Today, our immigrant communities are under

unprecedented attack, threats that weaken both our cities and its economy. We have witnessed indiscriminate enforcement, illegal detentions, and racial profiling with arbitrary quotas that mandating that the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, ICE, officers make 75 enforcement arrests per day. President Trump has ordered immigration authorities to detain individuals, quote, to the fullest extent possible. This significantly increased the number of people held in ICE and Customs and Border Protection. These facilities that government experts and federal courts has previously deemed as barbaric and unconstitutional. All this creates conditions that are ripe for the proliferation of immigration service fraud. I-ARC members see the consequence of notarial frauds firsthand, and I'm bringing an example of one of our members. The illegal project is currently serving two clients (TIMER CHIME) who has previous came by a man named Fernando Aguilar, who has charged these two victims around 6,000 dollars and 13,000 dollars just to file an asylum application with a scheme that brings biometrics appointments and a genuine letter from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. All these examples demonstrate the kind of

1 fraud that victims might face at this moment. Our
2 recommendation from I-ARC, and you can see it more in
3 the summation of the testimony, we want to expand and
4 promote community resources for education. I think
5 that's the first thing that we need to promote
6 education for all our services providers. Just like
7 Immigrant Help New York that we have a different
8 language access and community face and know your
9 rights and how to introduce when ICE attentions comes
10 to you. The ABA's Commission of Immigration has
11 states fight notarial fraud, as does the American
12 Immigration Lawyers Association that I also cited on
13 the document. We also want to expand public funding
14 for legal representation, because this is the bare
15 minimum that we could do for our immigrants in New
16 York. Expand and have free access to legal
17 representation. I also want to note that Immigrant
18 ARC is part of Protecting Immigrant New Yorkers,
19 known as PINY Task Force, which was created in 2013
20 and strengthened the enforcement against unauthorized
21 practice of immigration law, and is led by NYC, New
22 York State Attorney General Office, District
23 Attorney's Offices, Local Government Consumer Affairs
24 Department, and different federal agencies. We invite
25

other organizations to join and keep this initiative
alive in this moment that we need it more than ever.
Thank you so much.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you,
Natalia, for all your work and recommendations. I
appreciate your testimony.

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: Good afternoon, my name is
Christian. I am not using my last name to protect my
identity.

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I'm here to talk about how I
was defrauded by someone who said she was my
attorney.

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: After I came to the U.S. in
New York City, I was desperate to find someone to
help me file for asylum.

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: I found someone on Facebook
who said she was an attorney.

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

INTERPRETER: We talked on WhatsApp, and
she said she could help me.

1

2

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

3

4

INTERPRETER: She later sent me the
instructions on how to transfer money.

5

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

6

7

INTERPRETER: And I paid her a total of
1,570 dollars.

8

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

9

10

INTERPRETER: She sent me a copy of my
asylum application and said that it had been
submitted.

11

12

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

13

14

INTERPRETER: And she later asked me to
appear on a videocall for an immigration court
hearing.

15

16

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

17

18

INTERPRETER: I remember she asked me to
dress formally.

19

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

20

21

INTERPRETER: I appeared at the hearing by
Google Meets.

22

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

23

24

INTERPRETER: My attorney appeared
virtually, and I remember the judge wearing a black
robe.

25

1

2

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

3

INTERPRETER: And the judge, who spoke

4

Spanish to me, told me that I had eight days to pay a

5

little over 5,000 dollars.

6

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

7

INTERPRETER: And that if I didn't pay at

8

that time, I would owe 25,000 dollars.

9

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

10

INTERPRETER: The judge told me that I

11

should work with my attorney in order to pay this.

12

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

13

INTERPRETER: This was the first time I

14

was working with an attorney so I had no idea this

15

was unusual.

16

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

17

INTERPRETER: I only learned because I was

18

working with law school students who sat with me

19

during the hearing and then informed me that the

20

immigration court judge should not have been charging

21

me any money and that my attorney was probably

22

tricking me into paying this money.

23

CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

24

INTERPRETER: They also told me the asylum

25

application and the receipt notice looked fake.

1 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

2 INTERPRETER: So I had no idea because I
3 can't read in English.

4 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

5 INTERPRETER: I got scared when the
6 students told me I had been defrauded.

7 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

8 INTERPRETER: I'm not even sure if this
9 attorney was a real attorney.

10 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

11 INTERPRETER: This is wrong, and there
12 should be information given to immigrants to be able
13 to protect ourselves against fraud.

14 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

15 INTERPRETER: And thankfully, I'm now
16 working with an attorney at the Legal Aid Society.

17 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

18 INTERPRETER: Other immigrants are being
19 defrauded like me.

20 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

21 INTERPRETER: And in this time, immigrants
22 are just afraid of saying anything about their rights
23 or how they should be treated fairly in this country.

24 CHRISTIAN: (SPEAKING FOREIGN LANGUAGE)

25

INTERPRETER: Thank you for letting me
speak.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: (SPEAKING FOREIGN
LANGUAGE)

DEBORAH LEE: My name is Deborah Lee, and
I'm the Attorney-in-Charge of the Immigration Law
Unit at the Legal Aid Society. Thank you for this
opportunity and the opportunity to testify. I'm
testifying today alongside Christian. We are not
including his name to protect his identity.

Non-citizens across this country and in
New York City are living under siege under this
current federal administration with a constant
prospect of detention and deportation. Our federal
government can now expel non-citizens and perhaps
also U.S. citizens to a country where they have no
lawful status, to a prison there for an indefinite
sentence, and can do this without regard for court
orders and to provide these people due process. Our
government is also encouraging the dismissal of
asylum claims because initially filed applications,
including those by unrepresented individuals, are not
deemed sufficiently legally detailed. And our
government is using the Internal Revenue Service to

1 hunt down immigrants and to cancel lawfully obtained
2 Social Security numbers to force non-citizens to live
3 in fear and go underground. For these reasons, as
4 well as over 243 policy actions by this
5 Administration, non-citizens are at high risk of
6 being a victim of immigration services fraud.
7 Unscrupulous attorneys and non-attorneys can and will
8 use this climate of fear to further exploit non-
9 citizens who are desperate for any help to navigate
10 our increasingly hostile immigration legal system.
11 With a dearth of immigration legal service providers,
12 non-citizens often find themselves paying for
13 immigration legal help that they cannot afford. At
14 Legal Aid, we have heard repeated accounts of clients
15 like Christian who have been defrauded in order to
16 take their money. We need the City to invest more in
17 immigration legal services for non-citizen New
18 Yorkers as well as provide robust community education
19 efforts to investigate fraud-related crimes. Thank
20 you for the opportunity to appear today.

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you. Thank
23 you so much for all the work that you are doing and
24 your partnership. Thank you.

25 DEBORAH LEE: Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: The next panel,
we're going to have Hannah Strauss and Marc Valinoti.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. Thank you.
Please begin.

HANNAH STRAUSS: Hi. Good afternoon, and
thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My
name is Hannah Strauss and I'm the Supervising
Attorney of the Immigration Court Help Desk and the
Family Group Legal Orientation Program at Catholic
Charities Community Services. Each year, our
programs, ICH and FGLOP, serve thousands of
unrepresented immigrants. We provide critical
education and guidance on deportation proceedings and
potential forms of immigration relief as well as
application assistance. We are uniquely situated
within the immigration courts and we provide first-
come, first-served consultations, so we find that
we're often the first free attorneys that people are
able to speak to about their immigration cases.
Unfortunately, today marks the final day of both ICH
and FGLOP as the federal government has chosen to
terminate our contracts as of midnight tonight.
Still, Catholic Charities remains deeply committed to
serving New York's immigrant community through our

broader legal services. Because of our wide reach, Catholic Charities regularly hears from immigrants who have been the victims of fraud. We have seen many heartbreaking examples that are echoed through the panelists who have already spoken today, including we have seen notarios who charge fees to complete asylum applications or other types of immigration applications only to file them incorrectly with incorrect information or not at all. Often, the immigrant is unaware that the notario is unable to provide legal advice or represent them in their court proceedings. We have also seen scammers posing as immigration attorneys, tricking migrants into believing that they have applied for asylum, as the panelists spoke about, by issuing fake notices and even fabricating entire virtual court hearings. This causes not just financial loss but also serious harm to legitimate cases where these individuals are attending fake hearings instead of their government-scheduled hearings. We have also seen many instances of these 10-year visa schemes where immigrants are misled into filing baseless applications (TIMER CHIME) that lead to the immigrant being placed into removal proceedings. We have also seen immigration

service providers who charge outrageous fees for
asylum applications and tie the work to installment
payments. They often then abandon those cases when
the individual is no longer able to pay and the
individual is left with no application filed and the
money lost. Catholic Charities strongly supports
Intros 980 and 205, currently under consideration,
which aim to increase penalties for fraudulent
practitioners and improve fraud prevention and
reporting. These measures are essential to protecting
our most vulnerable neighbors from life-altering
harm. Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Thank you very
much.

MARC VALINOTI: Good afternoon. My name is
Marc Valinoti. I'm the Assistant Director of
Immigrant and DV Services at NMIC. So, I don't want
to be redundant with my other peers and colleagues
who have testified. I do want to highlight a very
common practice we see as an immigration service
provider. Instances of fraud range from the
extravagant, which a gentleman just presented, but
all too often they're very similar and simplistic
schemes. I know the Consumer Protection Department,

1 you know, I have faith that they're doing good work,
2 but there should be many, many more complaints being
3 filed in a city of this size. To illustrate, a client
4 is promised employment authorization and a path to
5 getting a green card. For anyone who's been surviving
6 or supporting a family without status for years or
7 decades even, this is an invaluable proposition no
8 matter the cost. As we talked about, the attorney or
9 notario prepares an application that they know will
10 never be approved. They rush the client through the
11 process, don't ask any relevant questions, and have
12 them sign without explaining. As mentioned in this
13 hearing, we frequently see or are seeing now
14 fraudulent Violence Against Women Act applications
15 with bogus claims of domestic violence that the
16 victim has not even been asked about. There's also,
17 of course, phony asylum claims for people who have
18 been here for years or decades when a claim normally
19 needs to be filed within one year. The scam relies on
20 the fact that victims become eligible for a temporary
21 work card while the app is pending. Therefore,
22 someone with a totally and facially baseless app will
23 receive an employment card by default. This is very
24 powerful in inducing and propagating fraud because
25

1
2 it's in their hands. They can see progress on their
3 case, but they don't understand that the government
4 issues these temporarily and that it has nothing to
5 do with the validity of the case. It is a very
6 insidious problem to educate people on. We are in
7 favor of both measures, but (TIMER CHIME) also
8 increased legal funding because the best way to
9 explain to someone that they should not seek out a
10 bad actor, that they shouldn't file anything, is a
11 one-on-one conversation where you establish trust
12 with the client and tell them that, unfortunately,
13 there's nothing for them, but we find ourselves
14 warning people more and more, like, please, do not
15 waste money. It will get you in trouble, and it will
16 just leave you with thousands of dollars poorer.
17 Thank you very much for the opportunity.

18 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Thank you so much.
19 Council Member Brewer has a question.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very
21 much. Both NMIC and Catholic Charities are the best.
22 Catholic Charities, so with that cut in funding,
23 what's Monsignor Sullivan going to do to keep people
24 doing the same work, if anything?
25

HANNAH STRAUSS: That's a great question. Right now, we're searching for additional funding. I think we've applied for funding from the City. We've applied for foundation funding, and we're hoping to hear back so that we can keep our staff, keep our team together, and keep doing the work that we are doing now.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: What kind of money are you looking for? What was the cut approximately?

HANNAH STRAUSS: It was 1.2 million was our contract for ICH and FGLOP.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you.

HANNAH STRAUSS: Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Great. Thank you both for coming today and testifying.

And our last in-person panel, before we go to Zoom, is Sharon Brown and Raul Rivera, if you could please come down. Thank you.

As was stated by my Co-Chair, there is actually no video recording, but you can submit transcripts of the recording to the Sergeant-at-Arms.

RAUL RIVERA: (INAUDIBLE)

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Sorry. I can't hear you.

RAUL RIVERA: We're not recording from the
table. We've been told many times. We understand it.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: So that's
permitted? Okay. Thank you for the clarification.
Okay. Do you want to?

RAUL RIVERA: Only from the witness table.

CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay. Do one of you
want to begin?

SHARON BROWN: Hello. My name is Sharon
Brown. Before I begin, release the hostages, let
Yahweh's people go, defend Israel, and happy holy
week.

For immigration, to combat fraud, we need
to know who people are. There should be a immigration
fraud database created of illegals who cross the
border when we catch them, and we also should have,
when people cross the border, we should have videos
and we should also have pictures taken at the border
so we can identify who it is and put out the videos
and put out the pictures so that someone might be
able to identify who they are, what country they come
from, or whatever. We should not have the immigrants
as the only one that are getting cash cards and all
of these different things. It should be for our

1 veterans, our military homeless, and those who
2 defended our country. We do want to take care of the
3 immigrants who come here who need sanctuary, whether
4 they cross the border or not. But we need to know who
5 they are. And when they do get here and they actually
6 need sanctuary, we need to make sure that we help
7 them with funding or whatever it is they need when we
8 actually determine they need our help. There's
9 circumstances in their country or something going on
10 that they need sanctuary, we will actually afford
11 that to them. But for those who are abusing it and
12 coming across, we need to make sure that we have a
13 database and we can get them out of the country. We
14 need to make sure the people that are crossing the
15 border weren't returning from being trafficked or
16 something like that so we definitely need a database
17 because some people that are (TIMER CHIME) crossing
18 the borders may have started out as Americans younger
19 or something like that. We just need to know who they
20 are.
21

22 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Okay.

23 SHARON BROWN: Thank you.

24 CO-CHAIRPERSON MENIN: Thank you.
25

RAUL RIVERA: Council Member Alexa Avilés,
Chair of the Immigration Committee, your actions have
raised serious concerns about your commitment to
representing the interests of American citizens and
native New Yorkers. Specifically, your defense of
individuals like Mahmoud Khalil, a known Hamas
sympathizer, is alarming. As a representative of
District 38, your primary responsibility is to serve
the people of New York City. Instead, your actions
seem to prioritize the interests of certain groups
like ProBono.net over those of your constituents. Key
concerns, lack of representation, your defense of
Hamas sympathizers suggests you're not prioritizing
the safety and well-being of American citizens and
native New Yorkers. Conflict of interest, your
actions may be seen as conflicting with the interests
of the community you serve, particularly given the
role as Chair of the Immigration Committee.
Questionable alliances, your association with
individuals or groups perceived as sympathetic to
Hamas raise questions about your allegiances,
commitment to the people of New York City. Call to
action, re-evaluate your priorities. We urge you to
reassess your priorities and ensure that your actions

align with the interests of your constituents.

Transparency and accountability, provide transparency regarding your association and actions and be held accountable for your decisions as a representative.

Serve the community, focus on serving the people of District 38 and New York City rather than the special interest groups. Conclusion, as a Council Member, your role is to serve the people, not special interest groups. Your actions have raised serious concern and it's essential to address these concerns promptly. Thank you to our 72nd United States Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, for sending back Mahbub Khalil back to where he belongs. Thank you so much.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Completely off topic. Moving on.

Next, we're going to have Christopher Leon Johnson.

If you cannot... decorum in the Chamber and if you cannot do that, you can be dismissed.

Mr. Johnson.

CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Hello, Chair Avilés. My name is Christopher Leon Johnson. I just came from Housing, about security guards. While at

the same time, about to say about the unions, but that's a different story. By the way, unions are part of the reason that the immigration frauds are happening because what happens is some of these immigration lawyers fund these unions under the table. What happens is that these politicians are scared of these unions, so they're empowered to do what they want. They're empowered to do what they want and that's what happens with these immigration lawyers. At the same time that the City Council needs to be more in government and really do their job and themselves as Council Members, as Council Members, not outsourcing this type of stuff to the non-profits, that you'd be surprised at getting money from these same immigration lawyers, so-called immigration lawyers, immigration services, to educate the people about what's a real immigration lawyer, what's your rights as an immigrant, what services you need to get, what services you can get as an immigrant, how much you got to pay. The City Council needs to design a unit within the City Council to designate certain non-profits that are eligible to do immigration services for constituents that's coming from the border. Let's keep that 100 percent. But

like I said, everybody knows a lot of fraud in this city because there's a lot of lawyers that they see this as a lot, they know the process of getting a green card or getting a visa or getting like a work permit, like a worker's permit, and they know every loophole, every exploitative loophole. But until these City Council Members here disassociate themselves from these so-called lawyers and these advocates, nothing's going to change here. So that's all I got to say. Thank you and enjoy your day.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you, Mr. Johnson.

And next we will move to virtual on Zoom, we'll call Alice Davis and Stephanie Rovine.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

ALICE DAVIS: Hi. Good afternoon, Committee Chairs Avilés and Menin and Members of the Committee on Immigration and Consumer and Worker Protection. Thank you for the opportunity to testify regarding Bills 205 and 980. My name is Alice Davis and I'm the Deputy Director at Catholic Migration Services. Catholic Migration Services provides free legal services and information to low-income New York City residents in three main areas, immigration,

workers' rights, and housing. For over 50 years, our Immigration Unit has provided both removal defense and affirmative legal assistance to immigrants residing in New York City. More recently, our Pro Se Plus team, which was created a few years ago, has worked with unrepresented asylum seekers with legal orientation, screenings, triage, and application assistance. To review some of what some of the other providers have said, the immigration process is often very long and expensive and complicated. And in recent years, the availability of quality and affordable immigration legal services has become very scarce. As a result, we are seeing that many of our immigrant clients have turned to notarios who falsely advertise immigration legal services, even though they have no legal training or not authorized to perform some of these services. We applaud the City Council for taking measures to protect New York City immigrant populations from fraudulent immigration services providers, and we feel that it is critical at this time to implement these additional protections. We have seen instances of providers who hold themselves out as non-profits but have charged exorbitant fees to prepare asylum applications. On

many occasions, we have cleaned up and corrected the mistakes of notarios, including the use of incorrect applications and the submissions of applications to incorrect government offices, and we have found that, in essence, our immigration team is spending an inordinate amount of time (TIMER CHIME)

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has expired.
Thank you.

ALICE DAVIS: Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Next, we have
Stephanie Rovine.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

STEPHANIE ROVINE: Hi. I'm Stephanie. I'm the Healing Centers Program and Development Director. It's an honor to be here today with so many people doing such important work on behalf of the community that we're all working with, and I'm here to just speak briefly about the importance of continued funding for the Healing Center during such a critical and scary time. The Healing Center's been a pillar of hope and strength to families and survivors of gender-based violence for 25 years with a specialty in working with immigrant survivors, and we walk with survivors along diverse dimensions of their lives,

1 including their immigration processes. We're taking a
2 lot of care at this time to refer to accurate
3 sources, to credible lawyers, and to protect our
4 participants, not only from threats by outside
5 scammers, but also by intimate partners and people
6 who know them well and understand how to capitalize
7 on fears and misinformation. And we wanted to speak
8 as well to the need for continued City Council
9 support. It's a very scary time for non-profits to be
10 so heavily dependent on federal funding. We've been
11 able to radically expand our programming throughout
12 the past two years with federal funds, and we're
13 seeing our partners who support immigrant
14 communities, who promote accurate information, and
15 who protect people against being frauded and scammed
16 suddenly losing funding with three days of notice.
17 This is one of the most important inflection points
18 in our history, and we're more dependent on City
19 Council funding than we've ever been. And we're
20 completely committed to not allowing these events to
21 hinder or prevent our mission of serving survivors of
22 gender-based violence for 25 years. And we work with
23 survivors who are in the midst of going through
24 immigration processes and securing, at the same time,
25

orders of protection, working through the most vulnerable things that have happened to them in support of counseling, or who are just starting to turn to us now after being alone and isolated for years (TIMER CHIME) and years and have never turned to someone before.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Your time has expired.
Thank you.

CO-CHAIRPERSON AVILÉS: Thank you so much, Stephanie, for your testimony and your work.

We have now heard from everyone who signed up to testify. If we have inadvertently missed anyone who would like to testify in person, please visit the Sergeant's table and complete a witness slip now. If we have inadvertently missed anyone who would like to testify virtually, please use the raise hand function in Zoom, and a Member of our Staff will call on you in the order of hands raised.

I will now read the names of those who have registered to testify but who have not yet filled out a witness slip or appeared on Zoom. Lurkey Ho (phonetic) and William Betancourt (phonetic).

Seeing no one else, I would like to note, again, that written testimony will be reviewed in

full by the Committee Staff, may be submitted to the
record up to 72 hours after the close of this hearing
by emailing it to testimony@council.nyc.gov.

And with that, this hearing has come to a
close. [GAVEL]

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 May 12, 2025