

NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

Preliminary Budget Hearing Before The New York City Council Committee on Immigration

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

March 6, 2025

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

My name is Manuel Castro, and I am the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA). I am joined here by Deputy Commissioner of Administration and Strategic Initiatives, Jasniya Sanchez, Deputy Commissioner of Programs and Policy, Lorena Lucero and Executive Director of the Office of Asylum Seeker Operations, Molly Shaefer.

Before I begin my formal remarks, I want to take a moment to speak directly to our immigrant communities.

To our immigrant neighbors, friends, family members, know there are an incredible number of people in our city, your fellow New Yorkers, that deeply care about you. Many of them are in this room. The Council members in front of us uplifting your concerns, the community organizations behind us fighting for you, and the individuals sitting at this table making sure our city government works for you.

In these times, you will hear an intense debate on what should or should not happen with our Sanctuary laws and policies. But today, I want to be incredibly clear: New York City's sanctuary laws and policies have not changed.

As you've heard directly from the school Chancellor, please continue to send your children to school without fear. As you've heard from our Police Commissioner, if you have witnessed or are a victim of a crime, please call 911. And as you've heard from the president of Health and Hospitals, please continue to seek healthcare at our public hospitals.

And now in Spanish:

A nuestros vecinos inmigrantes, amigos y familiares: quiero que sepan que hay una increíble cantidad de personas en nuestra ciudad, sus compañeros neoyorquinos, que se preocupan profundamente por ustedes. Muchos de ellos están en esta sala. Los miembros del Consejo Municipal que están enfrente a nosotros expresando sus preocupaciones, las organizaciones comunitarias luchando por ustedes y las personas sentadas en esta mesa asegurándose de que nuestro gobierno municipal trabaje para ustedes.

En los tiempos que estamos, escucharán un intenso debate sobre lo que debería o no debería suceder con nuestras leyes de ciudad santuario. Pero hoy, quiero ser increíblemente claro: las leyes y políticas de ciudad santuario de Nueva York no han cambiado.

Como lo han escuchado directamente de nuestra canciller de las escuelas publicas, sigan enviando a sus niños a la escuela sin temor; Como lo han escuchado de parte de nuestra comisionada de policía, llamen al 911 si han sido víctimas de un crimen; Y como lo han escuchado del presidente de nuestro sistema de hospitales públicos, continúen buscando atención médica en nuestros hospitales.

For today's testimony, I will provide a brief update on MOIA overall, and highlight 4 key areas of work of particular interest to our immigrant communities:

- Legal services,
- Language access,
- English learning, and
- Community engagement.

Overall update

MOIA remains steadfast in to serving our immigrant communities, within the limitations and constraints of our city charter responsibilities, which are to develop and implement policies designed to assist immigrants and non-English speakers.

My team, which is currently resourced with 64 personnel and approximately \$26.7 million budget for fiscal year 2025. We will continue to go above and beyond to elevate the needs of immigrant communities.

During my tenure, we have increased the scale of our work with community

organizations. We have over 70 contracts with immigrant serving non-profits throughout the city, which play a critical role in reaching immigrant communities. Further, MOIA has stepped up to provide more investment in legal immigration services than ever before. MOIA will continue to promote utilization of city services by immigrant New Yorkers.

I'll begin with an overview of MOIA's Immigration Legal Services.

MOIA is committed to expanding access to legal services for immigrant communities. Over the past year, MOIA has worked extensively with non-profits and faith-based organizations to inform immigrant communities of their rights and about the availability of city services. Last fiscal year, MOIA invested more in legal services provision and Know Your Rights materials than ever before.

MOIA's Immigration Legal Programs include Immigration Legal Support Centers, Immigration Legal Support Hotline, Asylum Seekers Legal Assistance Network, Immigrant Rights Workshops and the Immigrant Rights Collaborative. Together these programs and initiatives expand access to immigration legal support to New York City's immigrant communities.

MOIA's **Immigration Legal Support Centers** is a \$7.9 million annually funded program that supports 18 immigrant serving nonprofit contractors which provide¹ culturally and linguistically responsive immigration legal assistance. Our contracted providers conducted over 12,000 legal screenings and opened over 5,800 new cases in Fiscal Year 2024.

MOIA also oversees an **Immigration Legal Support Hotline** in partnership with Catholic Charities which provides consultations and referrals to immigrant New Yorkers. More than 64,000 people have called this hotline in 2024.

In FY25, MOIA committed \$5 million to the **Asylum Seeker Legal Assistance Network** (ASLAN)². This investment in nonprofit capacity provides linguistically and culturally responsive immigration legal assistance for newly arrived migrants residing both in and out of our city shelter. The network allows new arrivals to receive individualized information, screenings, and application assistance. ASLAN also makes available content on people's

rights and responsibilities in the immigration process. More than 8,000 people have

¹ African Communities Together (ACT), African Services Committee (ASC), Arab American Association of New York (AAANY), BronxWorks, Inc., CAMBA Legal Services, Inc. Caribbean Women's Health Association (CWAH), Catholic Charities Community Services (CCCS), Center for Family Life (CFL), Chhaya Community Development Corporation (Chhaya CDC), Chinese American Planning Council (CPC), Haitian Americans United for Progress (HAUP), Immigrant Justice Corps (IJC), Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement, Little Sisters of the Assumption (LSA), Lutheran Social Services of Metropolitan New York (LSSNY), Make the Road New York (MRNY), MinKwon Center for Community Action, Inc. New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG), Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (NMIC) Sunnyside Community Services (SCS), The Door.

² Organizations include: African Services Committee, New York Legal Assistance Group, Inc., Pro Se Plus Project (UnLocal), CALA, African Communities Together, MASA), Catholic Charities Community Services, Lutheran Social Services of New York, and CUNY Citizenship Now!

participated in ASLAN information sessions and workshops, and more than 3,300 community members have received individual consultations with ASLAN legal staff.

Further, in January 2025, MOIA launched the **Immigrant Rights Collaborative** to deliver immigrant rights presentations in shelters, faith-based organizations, schools, and other community spaces.³ In just two months, over 1,000 individuals have been reached through these workshops.

Next, I'll provide an update on MOIA's Language Access Programs.

MOIA has made significant strides in Language Access. As I have shared in the past, I view language access as a civil rights issue. Language access should not be an obstacle to accessing services. For this reason, MOIA established the Language Access Hub, which built capacity to provide in-house expertise on language access and language services. This team provides translation and interpretation services for mayoral offices, and reports on the city's language access work and implementation of local laws, including Local Law 30. In 2024, MOIA's Language Access team provided translation services to 37 Mayoral offices, on-site language support at migrant centers across the City, and critical capacity for rapid translation of evolving messaging on shelter protocols for recent arrivals. We also work to provide technical assistance and guidance on language access to 45 city agencies.

Now, moving on to our English Learning Programs.

English learning continues to be a priority for immigrant communities and remains a key workforce development strategy. To increase the capacity for English language learning, my office has launched the MOIA English Learning and Support Centers at nearly 100 public library branches and community centers located in immigrant-dense neighborhoods. The classes use our award-winning We Speak curriculum to host in-person English classes. In addition, during my time we've developed comprehensive beginner level materials, which have been requested by community and advocates. Our curriculum aims to improve access to both English language learning and familiarity with City services.

Finally, MOIA's Community Engagement work creates pathways for immigrants to navigate & access city services.

Recognizing the importance of connecting immigrant New Yorkers to resources, MOIA continued to fund community-based organizations as "navigation centers" to help recently arrived migrants. We expanded to 15 navigation sites and have almost 30,000 touchpoints in FY25.

Community engagement is a pillar of MOIA's approach to serving immigrant communities. In 2024, the MOIA External Affairs and Outreach team made nearly 52,000 touchpoints with immigrant communities through resource fairs, tabling, Days of

³ The list of participants include Center for Family Life (CFL), DSI International (DSI), Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement, Korean Community Services (KCS), Life of Hope (LOH), Lutheran Social Services of New York (LSSNY), Mexican Coalition, Mixteca, Muslim Community Network (MCN), New Immigrant Community Empowerment, Project New Yorker (PNY), and United Sikhs.

Action, Know-Your-Rights presentations, and canvassing across the five boroughs.

MOIA also led 8 immigrant media roundtables which facilitates information flow to the immigrant community through hyper-local newspapers and TV stations in their own languages, further strengthening relationships with immigrant focused media outlets and building trust between immigrant communities and the City.

Conclusion

Finally, as I always do at our hearing. I wish to thank city's public servants who have responded to the needs for both recently arrived and long-standing immigrant New Yorkers.

Thank you again for calling this hearing. I look forward to working with the Council to resource programs that serve immigrant communities.

Testimony of New York City Mayor's Office of Asylum Seeker Operations Director Molly Schaeffer on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026 Before the New York City Council Committee on Immigration

March 6, 2025

Introduction

Good morning, Chair Aviles and members of the Committee. My name is Molly Schaeffer, and I serve as the Director of New York City's Mayor's Office of Asylum Seeker Operations (OASO). I am grateful for the opportunity to discuss our office's budget and operational impact on the City's shelter operations.

Since April 2022, New York City has led the country's response to the migrant emergency, providing critical support to nearly 233,000 individuals who have sought refuge in our City and received assistance from our system. This number reflects the sheer magnitude of our commitment to provide aid and support. For more than two years, we have witnessed up close the extraordinary scale of this emergency as well as the tremendous number of resources mobilized for our response. Through January 2024, New York City has spent an estimated \$7.14 billion on the asylum seeker response, and is projected to spend \$2.66 billion in fiscal year 2026.

Our operation includes three sheltering agencies and more than 20 other agencies supporting the response – a whole-of-government and society approach; and while we have seen a significant decrease in the number of asylum seekers entering shelter each week since the height of the response, approximately 43,000 individuals remain in our care across 181 sites

Since the spring of 2022, we have opened more than 258 emergency shelter sites – and provided health care, education, work training, jobs, legal support and much more. Due to these efforts, over 189,300 migrants, or 81 percent, have taken the next steps in their journey towards self sufficiency.

This is a story of New York City stepping up, managing, and doing everything possible, with little to no support.

OASO roles and responsibilities

This Administration announced the creation of OASO in March 2023 as the central team managing the City's asylum seeker response effort. Since then, our office has led inter-agency coordination of policy, data, and regulatory considerations and has led advocacy and strategic initiatives necessary to manage this continuing critical mission.

Significant achievements to highlight include the activation of our first-in-the-nation Asylum Application Help Center. Since opening the Center in 2023, I am proud to report we have completed nearly 100,000 applications for asylum, work authorization, and temporary protected status, helping get people on the pathway to work and self-sufficiency. We have opened satellite sites and partnered with nonprofits, law firms, as well as the state and federal government. Our centers, staffed with over 150 application assistants, immigration attorneys, and interpreters exemplify New York City's commitment to supporting individuals in their pursuit of the American Dream.

OASO's budget

OASO operates with a lean, yet dedicated team of 27 full-time staff members with a personnel budget of \$3.5 million in FY25. As a crucial coordinating body, OASO leads the City's response to the humanitarian crisis with the influx of asylum seekers arriving in New York City. It is important to note that OASO does not directly manage shelter operations, oversee operational expenses, or manage related contracts.

Instead, our role is centered around managing and coordinating collaboration across city agencies, developing policies, supporting implementation efforts, leveraging expertise across Agency partners, and driving informed decision-making.

OASO was established to move the city towards a steady state of operations. The results of our work demonstrate our success. The City's efforts to help asylum seekers achieve self-sufficiency, together with federal policy changes that we advocated for, have stabilized the crisis and contributed to 35 straight weeks of census decline. The FY26 Preliminary Plan reflects savings of \$1.09B in FY25 and \$1.34B in FY26, associated with the lower number of asylum seekers in our care – bringing total citywide asylum seeker savings to nearly \$5.2B over three fiscal years.

To be clear, we've accomplished these results while responding to an unprecedented crisis in a more effective and efficient manner. This is a win for New Yorkers and for those in our shelter systems.

Conclusion

In closing, I want to reiterate the Administration's commitment to upholding the values of compassion, efficiency, and accountability as we continue to navigate this humanitarian crisis. The effective implementation of policies that have directly impacted the populations we continue to serve has led to tremendous success in meeting the needs of nearly 233,000 migrants who have come through our system of care. Our ability to navigate the recently announced closure of several of the 258 emergency response shelters – including the Roosevelt Hotel, which served 154,100 migrants arriving in New York – as well as all tent-based Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Centers, highlights the effectiveness of our overall response. With that being said, the work we do remains fluid as we respond creatively to the needs of individuals who depend on us and are in our care.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to your questions.



JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS

**STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON
IMMIGRATION
MARCH 6, 2025**

Good morning,

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

In advance of the discussions being held at today's hearing, I would like to make one thing very clear. The funding of services for our newest New Yorkers has been wielded by our mayor and now the President as a political weapon that seeks to distort a simple reality: even in the face of the billions of dollars the city has spent on asylum seeker services, this number pales in comparison to the cost of Trump's immigration agenda. For everyone who might object to the expenditure of city and state resources to welcome our newest New Yorkers, please think about the cost of chartered planes, or private detention facilities, and of ever-expanding law enforcement. Think about the contributions that our immigrant communities make to our city's economy and what a loss of labor, goods, and tax dollars will cost our city.

The answer is simple. The resources we devote to our most vulnerable New Yorkers is a fraction of the cost of what the Mayor President, excuse me, the mayor AND president, are proposing. The conservative estimate put forth by pro-Trump thinktanks estimates the national cost at \$500 billion, more than two-hundred times the cost of our city's budget this year.¹ In fact, peer-reviewed economists have predicted that the true cost of Trump's immigration agenda, combined with the loss of labor and tax payer dollars, is over \$6 trillion.²

To the detriment of our city and its goods and services, the Mayor has continuously overbudgeted for asylum seeker services. You will hear him boast about saving more than \$2 billion dollars in this year's budget. This is money that was allocated for asylum seekers and never properly spent, yet, the Mayor is still insisting that we require more State funds for these operations. His tactics to scapegoat our vulnerable communities and manufacture a fraudulent picture of the use of tax payer dollars is both regrettable and misleading. This is the same overbudgeting scheme that blames the closure of libraries, crucial programs, and now childcare facilities on our newest New Yorkers. In fact, we should be blaming the Mayor.

¹ <https://www.cato.org/commentary/math-mass-deportation-doesnt-add>

² Ibid.

As the number of asylum seekers in our shelters continues to decrease, we must now become intentional about retaining our baseline of necessary asylum seeking services while also addressing the increased danger being imposed on our communities. We must ensure that NYC's Department of Homeless Services can fill the void left by closing emergency facilities for those still in need of shelter.

Besides housing - which I believe is a right and not an optional service - the most critical lifeline for our non-citizen communities are our rapid response legal services. I am calling on the Mayor and the Council to answer the call of the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative for an additional \$33 million, just over \$11 million per organization. During times of heightened exclusion, federally-sponsored racism, and scapegoating, our lawyers are our frontline workers. They deserve to have funding that is adequate and flexible enough to make sure that long term legal care for individuals in need can be funded.

New York City is, and always will be, a city of immigrants. Our newest New Yorkers are no different from our city's many grandparents and great-grandparents who landed on Ellis Island. We have a fiduciary responsibility as public servants, family members, and humans to continue to care for our vulnerable communities and that means putting our money where our hearts are.

Thank you.



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

**FY 2026 Preliminary Budget Hearing:
Committee on Immigration
Council Member Alexa Avilés, Chair**

**Submitted by Paula Inhargue, Policy Analyst
March 6, 2025**

Thank you, Chair Avilés and members of the New York City Council Committee on Immigration for convening today's Preliminary Budget hearing. United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing neighborhood settlement houses that reach over 800,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life. A progressive leader for more than 100 years, UNH is stewarding a new era for New York's settlement house movement. We mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development. We also provide customized professional development and peer learning to build the skills and leadership capabilities of settlement house staff at all levels.

As the new federal administration rapidly targets immigrants across the country, appearing to follow through on the President's commitment to mass deportation, intensified enforcement policies are increasing the vulnerability of immigrant communities. Settlement houses play a crucial role in providing these communities with the support and protection they need, and the New York City FY26 budget must acknowledge this destructive reality by funding programs that support immigrant families. Our testimony will focus on sustaining and expanding funding for Adult Literacy in New York City and ensuring that children who would not otherwise qualify for subsidies can access the child care they need.

Maintain the \$16.5 million total in discretionary funding for the City Council's Adult Literacy Initiative and Adult Literacy Pilot Project.

UNH advocates for an adult literacy system that provides quality, comprehensive, and accessible educational services for New Yorkers to improve their literacy skills, learn English, obtain a High School Equivalency diploma, and enter training and post-secondary education.

In New York City, an estimated 2 million adults have limited English-language proficiency or lack a high school diploma. No-cost community-based adult literacy programs such as English for Speakers

of Other Languages (ESOL), adult basic education (ABE), and high school equivalency (HSE) preparation programs enable New Yorkers to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to secure higher-paying jobs that can sustain their families, support their children's education, and advocate for themselves and their families. Adult literacy programs run by settlement houses and other community-based organizations often serve as entry points for adult learners who are subsequently connected to workforce training support and other wraparound services that strengthen their families' economic and social well-being.

The wave of newcomers to New York City since 2022 has increased the need for adult literacy education. Adult literacy education is especially critical to helping new and long-time immigrant New Yorkers build skills and knowledge, as ESOL classes allow students to learn English grammar, practical information, and technology skills that they are able to use after they leave the classroom.

In FY25, DYCD's Adult Literacy RFP introduced new geographical restrictions, limiting the eligibility of organizations to apply for funding based on their location, and these changes left a lot of organizations without funding to sustain their adult literacy programs. In response, the City Council increased funding for adult literacy initiatives to \$16.5 million in FY25. This was an impactful increase that has been critical for sustaining programs run by settlement houses and other community-based organizations.

The City Council's \$16.5 million Adult Literacy Initiative and Adult Literacy Pilot Project currently fund 62 programs, including 15 programs run by UNH members, that reach thousands of adults. For four UNH settlement house adult literacy program providers (CAMBA, Center for Family Life, Queens Community House and Sunnyside Community Services), City Council discretionary funding is the sole funding source sustaining these programs, and they have served or expect to serve more than 3,100 students collectively. Without renewed funding, organizations excluded from the current DYCD literacy portfolio will not be able to offer adult literacy classes after June 30th of this year.

It is necessary for adult learners to have stable programs and support, as continued City Council funding supports staffing and essential program infrastructure and thousands of adult learners depend on these programs for essential skills. Ideally, these programs would be supported by a robust, baselined program managed by DYCD that offered students and providers stability with year-over-year funding. However, until DYCD revisits its unnecessarily restrictive stance on geographic priority for programming, it is crucial that the City Council continue this support to make sure that adult learners continue to have access to quality classes.

Restore and baseline the Administration for Children's Services' Promise NYC program at \$25 million to provide child care to children who would not otherwise qualify for subsidized child care.

Under Promise NYC, four providers, including three settlement houses, have contracted with the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) to implement a child care voucher program in each of their respective boroughs (NMIC in the Bronx and Manhattan, Center for Family Life in Brooklyn, Chinese-American Planning Council in Queens, and La Colmena in Staten Island). Since the program launched in FY23, providers have been reporting full enrollment and long waitlists, which demonstrates the need and desire from families to have these seats.

Promise NYC was funded at \$25 million in the City's FY 2025 budget, and this increased investment has helped clear waitlists across the program. However, this funding was not baselined, so programs are anticipating that child care will end on June 30th and families will abruptly be left without a child care arrangement. We urge the City to **restore and baseline \$25 million for Promise NYC** in the FY 2026 budget so that families can continue to access the affordable, subsidized child care they need.

Thank you for your consideration. For more information, please reach me at pinhargue@unhny.org

Committee of Immigration

"The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026, The Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2026-2029, and The Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report"

Testimony from African Communities Together

March 6, 2025

Good afternoon Chair Avilés and members of the Committee on Immigration. Thank you for holding today's important Preliminary Budget Hearing. My name is Airenakhue B. Omoragbon and I am the New York Policy Manager at African Communities Together (ACT). ACT is a national membership organization that is by and for African immigrants. We are dedicated to fighting for civil rights, economic opportunity, and a better life for immigrants in the United States. The members of our New York Chapter hail from countries like Senegal, Mali, Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Mauritania. We also have chapters in the D.C. Metro Area and Pennsylvania.

As NY Policy Manager, I support ACT's leadership in the Language Justice Collaborative (LJC) and work with organizations like MASA, the Asian-American Federation (AAF), Haitian American United for Progress (HAUP), the Immigrant Advocates Response Collaborative (I-ARC), and the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) to eliminate language and cultural barriers to New York immigrants' access to public services. We also work to create a pipeline to employment for New Yorkers trained in interpretation.

I am here today to ask the City Council to advocate for the renewal of \$3.8M in funding for the Interpreter Bank and New York's language services cooperatives.

When it comes to enhancing and broadening New York City's language access policy, African Communities Together is not new to this fight. From 2016 to present, the Collaborative has been advocating for legislation mandating the translation of state and city services into multiple languages. We have also empowered the economic uplift of immigrants through the development of co-ops. We even launched AfriLingual, New York's very first African worker-owned language collaborative, and are months close to working with the Collaborative to launch the first NY Community Interpreter Bank.

Last year, thanks to your leadership and the support of your colleagues at the Council, the Collaborative was granted \$3.8M. We are extremely proud of the work we were able to do which included, but was not exclusive to:

- Expanding the language services provided by AfriLingual to meet the language needs of Africans living in New York City;
- Partnering with the City University of New York (CUNY), particularly Hostos, to develop and launch a new 60-hour certification course for community interpreters;
- Developing the soon to launch NY Community Interpreter Bank, which will open in the spring of this year;

- Supporting Haitian community based organization(s), like Haitian American United for Progress in efforts to develop Haitian language co-ops; and
- Working to develop and launch Latin American and Asian language co-ops.

As you and I both know, we are in unprecedented times and New York City is under attack. Over the last 100 days, President Trump has put out executive orders aimed at altering the U.S. longstanding birthright citizenship policy, submitted “stop work” orders to refugee resettlement organizations providing services to refugees resettled in the United States, and begun to use the Guantanamo Bay Naval Base as a detention site for undocumented immigrants.

As recently as 5 days ago, President Trump signed an executive order designating English as the official language of the United States. Our city’s Mayor is compromised and is no longer able or willing to protect the communities that make New York City as vibrant as it has historically been. My big fear, in response to this particular executive order, is that in times of emergency, African communities and other communities with Limited English Proficiency will be further isolated and vulnerable, when it comes to accessing vital and critical services.

Renewing the Language Access Grant and other initiatives pertaining to language access will help African Communities Together and the Language Justice Collaborative elevate our efforts to provide support for legal services, improve rapid response efforts, and increase the critical community and KYR trainings necessary to protect our communities in this season. It will also give us the wiggle room to respond to the challenges we will continue to face, as a result of the budding relationships between the Mayor and the current Trump administration.

I would like to thank the City Council for all of the work you have been doing over the last year, for empowering immigrant New Yorkers, and your commitment to prioritizing language access in budget negotiations. We hope that we can continue to collaborate with you on this important issue in FY26 and years to come.

Thank you.

Submitted by:
Airenakhue B. Omoragbon, MSSW, LMSW
NY Policy Manager
African Communities Together



**Testimony from the New York City Anti-Violence Project (AVP) To the Committee on
Immigration at the Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 6, 2025**

Paulina Cohen, Staff Attorney

Good afternoon, Chair Avilés and the Committee on Immigration. My name is Paulina Cohen, and I am a Staff Attorney at the New York City Anti-Violence Project (AVP). I want to express my gratitude for your ongoing support of our work with LGBTQ and HIV-affected survivors of violence. AVP has long been at the forefront of New York City's fight against hate and oppression, offering critical support to the LGBTQ and immigrant communities, particularly in the area of immigration.

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

In particular, the need for comprehensive and culturally competent legal services has grown. AVP, as the only LGBTQ-specific victim services agency in New York City, is uniquely positioned to provide critical legal support to LGBTQ immigrants who are survivors of violence. Our work includes a wide range of immigration services such as asylum, U and T Visas, VAWA self-petitions, work authorization, adjustment of status, and naturalization. We also conduct outreach to ensure that survivors are aware of and able to access these services.

Our co-location model integrates legal services with vital social services, ensuring that clients receive comprehensive, trauma-informed care. This model allows us to address not only the legal needs of our clients but also their emotional and social needs, offering holistic support to help them rebuild their lives. In addition to direct legal services, we also offer clinics, webinars, and seminars to help the community understand their rights and access services.

I'd like to share a story about one of our clients, whom I'll refer to as Luke. Back in November, Luke called AVP's 24-hour hotline to report that he had been sexually assaulted by his boyfriend, with whom he was living. Our team explored with him possible legal



pathways, such as reporting to the police or applying for a U Visa. We also determined that Luke had a strong case for asylum.

Just a few weeks ago, I had the privilege of representing Luke at his asylum interview. He bravely testified about the severe violence he had experienced in his home country and shared the positive life he is building here, thanks in part to the support he receives from AVP. Luke also benefits from counseling services provided by our client services department, ensuring that he receives the comprehensive support he needs.

AVP is committed to expanding its services to meet the growing demand, especially for transgender clients who are being specifically targeted by federal policies. In FY 2024, our Legal Department handled over 281 cases, with nearly 70% of those being immigration related. After the first Trump administration, there was an increase in the demand for immigration-related legal services. This trend continued under the Biden administration, particularly with the influx of LGBTQ migrants seeking refuge in New York, and of course, continues now just over one month into the second Trump administration. What is clear is that the overwhelming demand for social and legal services from the LGBTQ and immigrant communities has outpaced the City's available resources, and AVP has stepped in to fill the gap.

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

In contrast to federal policies that have undermined the safety and dignity of LGBTQ, immigrant, and survivor communities, New York City remains a beacon of support. It is critical that the City Council continue investing in community-based solutions like AVP to protect some of our most vulnerable members. The funding we receive allows us to provide direct services, outreach, and advocacy that are essential in this moment of crisis.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

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TESTIMONY OF THE ARAB AMERICAN FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION March 6th, 2025

A few weeks into the new federal administration, devastating changes are already taking a toll on the communities we serve. As the Arab American Family Support Center (AAFSC) continues to navigate these challenges, I am testifying today with an urgent request: **Community-based organizations (CBOs) like AAFSC need your immediate support to continue serving vulnerable New Yorkers.**

Federal Funding for Critical Services Is in Jeopardy

Our federally funded mental health (SAMHSA) and anti-violence (OVS) programs are facing unprecedented uncertainty. While we anticipated future reductions, we believed that already-approved funding for this fiscal year was secure. **That is no longer the case.**

AAFSC now faces a shortfall of nearly **\$1.2 million**, including **\$240,000 in expenses already incurred and invoiced**—funds we may never receive. We are spending approximately **\$75,000 per month** to sustain federally funded staff, a rate we **cannot** maintain without immediate action.

Like many CBOs, AAFSC does not have an endowment or reserve funds to cover these gaps while waiting for federal decisions. If this funding disappears, critical services—including mental health counseling and domestic violence intervention—will be at risk.

How NYC's Immigrant Communities Are Affected

Recent federal policies have placed immigrant communities in **immediate danger** by eliminating protections for undocumented individuals, escalating enforcement actions, and limiting access to essential services. These policies disproportionately target the **Muslim, Arab, Palestinian, Black, and South Asian communities** we serve.

The federal administration's newly announced **quota of 75 ICE arrests per field office per day** sends a clear message: this is not just about criminals. We anticipate widespread sweeps that will tear families apart and drive community members further into the shadows.

We are already seeing the impact:

- **Declining attendance** in our English classes, as students fear leaving shelters.
- **A drop in social service enrollments**, such as food stamps, due to concerns about sharing personal information with the federal government.

- **An increased reluctance** to seek help, even when in crisis.

In response, we have **strengthened security** at our facilities, implementing **double sets of locking doors** to screen visitors and ensure that no enforcement action occurs without a judicial warrant. We have also trained our staff to respond appropriately should ICE officers attempt to enter our spaces.

Protecting AAFSC from Federal Harassment

We anticipate that federal agencies will intensify scrutiny of nonprofit organizations like ours, using audits and regulatory hurdles to disrupt services. To prepare, we are actively seeking **pro bono legal support** to review our policies, government contracts, insurance coverage, and regulatory reporting.

This work is **unfunded but necessary** to ensure that AAFSC remains a resource for thousands of vulnerable families across New York City.

How You Can Help

As a **New York City Council Member**, you are in a unique position to protect CBOs like AAFSC and the communities we serve. We urge you to:

1. **Advocate for emergency city funding** to help organizations like ours bridge federal funding gaps.
2. **Publicly reaffirm NYC's commitment to being a sanctuary city** by ensuring that city agencies do not cooperate with unjust federal immigration enforcement.
3. **Support legal protections and resources** for immigrant communities facing increased enforcement threats.
4. **Allocate additional funding** to CBOs providing mental health, anti-violence, and social services to at-risk families.

Now is the time for bold action. Our communities are scared, our resources are stretched thin, and the challenges ahead are immense. We ask for your partnership in **ensuring that New York City stands strong against federal intimidation and continues to be a place of refuge for all.**

We are grateful for your leadership and look forward to working together to protect the most vulnerable among us.



Asian American Federation

Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Immigration

March 6, 2025

Written Testimony

Thank you to Chair Alexa Avilés and the Committee on Immigration for holding this hearing and for giving us the opportunity to testify on the FY 26 Budget. I am Navdeep Bains, the Associate Director of Advocacy & Policy at the Asian American Federation, where we proudly represent the collective voice of more than 70 member nonprofit organizations serving 1.5 million Asian New Yorkers.

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

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

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

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

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

Increase Immigration Services for Pan-Asian New Yorkers

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

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

Language Access and Language Justice

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

Within FY 25, AAF worked with our nonprofit member organizations to recruit community members to serve as prospective translators in the Asian language worker cooperative. Thus far, we have screened those in the recruitment pool and are sending 40 people who passed the screening process through language testing to ensure they meet the qualifications to become translators. In FY 26, we plan to: (1) identify three additional Asian languages to contribute to the cooperative's capacity; (2) continue training prospective co-op members for the original five Asian languages identified in FY 25 (Arabic, Bengali, Chinese (Cantonese, Mandarin, Fujianese, and Shanghainese), Korean, and Urdu), as well as the three new languages identified in FY 26; (3) start leveraging the interpreter capacity built through testing and training prospective co-op members to offer language access services to community members in need; and (4) provide support and training needed for co-op members on topics such as building a

worker-owned cooperative, supporting business development, organizing the cooperative's structure, and marketing to develop an independently functioning cooperative.

Prospective members of the cooperative trained through this program will be poised to provide interpretation and translation services, as well as ESOL instruction, within 1-2 years. In addition to providing government and nonprofit interpretation, they have the potential to meet the ever-growing demand for professional, high-quality language services for courts, hospitals, schools, and the private sector, while also providing skilled employment and business ownership opportunities to immigrant communities.

Citywide funding requests to support our work across our Asian Community

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

Support AAFs work and priorities through:

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

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

If you have any questions, I can be contacted by email at navdeep.bains@aafederation.org or by phone at (212) 344-5878 ext. 225.



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TESTIMONY OF:

**Catherine Gonzalez,
Supervising Attorney and Policy Counsel**

BROOKLYN DEFENDER SERVICES

Presented before

**The New York City Council Committee on Immigration Preliminary Budget Hearing –
Immigration**

March 6, 2025

Introduction

My name is Catherine Gonzalez. I am the Immigration Policy Counsel and a Supervising Attorney in the *Padilla* Unit of the Criminal Defense Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS). BDS is a public defense office whose mission is to provide outstanding representation and advocacy free of cost to people facing loss of freedom, family separation and other serious legal harms by the government. I thank the New York City Council Committee on Immigration, in particular Chair Avilés, for the opportunity to testify about our budget needs to serve New York City's immigrant communities.

For nearly 30 years, BDS has worked, in and out of court, to protect and uphold the rights of individuals and to change laws and systems that perpetuate injustice and inequality. We represent approximately 23,000 people each year who are accused of a crime, facing loss of liberty, their home, their children, or deportation. Our staff consists of specialized attorneys, social workers, investigators, paralegals, and administrative staff who are experts in their individual fields. BDS also provides a wide range of additional services for our clients, including civil legal advocacy, assistance with educational needs of our clients or their children, housing, and benefits advocacy, as well as immigration advice and representation.

BDS' Immigration Practice protects the rights of immigrant New Yorkers by defending against ICE detention and deportation, minimizing the negative immigration consequences of criminal and family charges for non-citizens, and representing immigrants in applications for immigration benefits. We represent people who are applying for immigration relief before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), and in removal proceedings in New York's immigration courts.

Since 2009, BDS has counseled, advised, or represented more than 22,000 people in immigration matters including deportation defense, affirmative applications, and immigration consequence

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consultations in Brooklyn's criminal court system. Our *Padilla* team attorneys are criminal-immigration specialists who provide support and expertise on thousands of cases, including advocacy regarding enforcement of New York City's detainer law, individualized immigration screenings, and legal consults. Along with the Bronx Defenders and The Legal Aid Society, BDS' New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP) team, the nation's first-ever publicly universal representation program for detained immigrants facing deportation, specializes in representing people who are detained while they await their deportation hearing. We also provide continued representation on immigration matters to our previously detained immigrant clients after securing their release from ICE custody. Since the inception of the program, BDS' NYIFUP practice has represented over 1,800 people in deportation proceedings.

I. NYIFUP: The Experience and Expertise Needed to Meet this Moment

For over a decade, NYIFUP has been the national model for universal representation for immigrants facing deportation. Since 2014, NYIFUP has provided robust and comprehensive legal representation and wraparound support services for people in detained deportation proceedings. During this time, our offices have represented thousands of people in deportation proceedings, providing representation and expertise in the complex legal issues that arise in these immigration cases.

Now more than ever, New York needs a strong and steadfast immigration defense program to meet the current unprecedented increase in enforcement and use of detention¹. Mass detention and deportation efforts have begun across this country, with New York City and those with criminal legal system involvement being particular targets. NYIFUP has over a decade of experience of serving New York immigrant communities in complex immigration matters in rapidly changing legal immigration landscapes. The complex nature of the cases our offices handle requires specialized expertise and extensive preparation and resources. Our offices have developed the expertise, training, and skill required in unprecedented times. We anticipate a rapid change in the size, scope and the pace of our work based upon the stated intention to expeditiously detain and deport thousands of New Yorkers.

Given that much of the anticipated changes to detention and enforcement efforts have yet to be unleashed, our program must remain flexible and have the resources needed to adapt to the changes.

Meeting Legal Service Needs Through Expertise in Complex Matters

BDS seeks to preserve family unity for people facing deportation, keep individuals living and working in their communities, protect the legal rights of immigrants, reduce the number of people in immigration detention, and strengthen the fabric of immigrant communities. Our work is

¹ [Under President Trump ICE Arrests Have Increased by 627% | Homeland Security](#)



centered on our clients and, in addition to providing legal representation and counsel, we support the health and stability of people facing deportation and their family members by connecting them to essential services, such as healthcare, counseling, BDS' civil legal services, and other community-based support.

BDS works at the intersection between the criminal legal and family court systems and the immigration legal system. We witness everyday how these systems treat immigrant New Yorkers unequally. Even minor criminal offenses, often the result of over-policing, can end up leading to mandatory incarceration in DHS detention facilities, or permanent separation from family and exclusion from this country because of the entanglement of the criminal or family legal systems and our federal immigration laws.

An arrest alone, even where the District Attorney declines to prosecute or where a judge dismisses and seals the case, can lead to immigration detention for an immigrant. Current Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) enforcement policies prioritize detention of immigrants with criminal legal system contact and relies upon state and local criminal legal systems to identify immigrants who could be deported. In 2017, our offices experienced a 45% increase in cases. We have witnessed an uptick in ICE enforcement in New York City in the past few years, and we expect this will continue to increase.

Prosecutors in immigration court are no longer required to utilize their discretion to resolve or dismiss cases². Thus, immigrant New Yorkers are likely to remain in removal proceedings for years. Additionally, as we saw from 2016 to 2020 and have already seen in the past several weeks, there will be rapid changes in policies and legal authority which will require a close study by immigration attorneys. With enhanced funding, NYIFUP will work to meet the demands of increased ICE enforcement and rapid changes to the law, provide technical assistance and training for our staff and partners, and continue to provide community-based know-your-rights and education.

BDS' NYIFUP staff conduct intake in local immigration courts and are assigned to represent people who have been detained by ICE, are facing deportation proceedings, and who qualify for our legal services. Our staff work tirelessly to avoid deportation and to keep our clients with their families, in their communities. With the support of this Council, we are also able to provide education and resources to the broader community and other legal providers.

² On January 29, 2025, EOIR Acting Director Sirce Owen issued Policy Memorandum 25-09, which states that it is rescinding and canceling the 6/11/21 Policy Memorandum 21-25 that provided EOIR policies regarding the effect of DHS enforcement priorities and the use of prosecutorial discretion." available at <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/media/1387491/dl?inline>



Interdisciplinary Model of Immigration Defense

NYIFUP representation is provided by interdisciplinary teams of attorneys, social workers, and legal advocates who collaborate with clients to provide excellent legal representation and support through a long, confusing, and intimidating process. Our teams represent people with pending deportation cases before immigration courts, the Board of Immigration Appeal (BIA), and the Second and Third Circuit Courts of Appeals. We also provide representation in ancillary proceedings before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, New York State family courts, as well as in federal district and appellate courts. Our exemplary model of immigration defense enables us to educate immigration communities as to the risks of deportation, and the availability of counsel if detained, and:

- Preserve family unity for people facing deportation
- Keep people in their neighborhoods, where they live and work, during their deportation cases
- Protect the legal rights of immigrants
- Reduce the number of people in immigration detention
- Strengthen the fabric of immigrant communities

With the support of the City Council, NYIFUP has been able to respond to shifts in ICE surveillance and arrests and changes in immigration law and policies to ensure all detained New Yorkers have counsel. With increased support from this Council, NYIFUP will be able to meet the increased need for legal representation to help keep New York's immigrant families together.

Expanding NYIFUP To Meet the Increased Need for Immigration Defense in New York

The three NYIFUP providers are seeking \$11,066,666 per organization, double our current budget, for the upcoming fiscal year. Increased funding in FY26 will enable us to:

- Adapt to changes in immigration enforcement
- Hire and onboard additional staff to meet increased need in immigration court
- Provide specialized legal technical assistance and outreach to community-based organizations regarding immigration detention
- Conduct a public education campaign to help New Yorkers understand their rights during ICE encounters and their options if a loved one is detained by ICE

In addition to picking up newly assigned cases, NYIFUP providers currently represent over 1,000 people who have been released from detention, many of whom will require extensive support and litigation during the pendency of their cases. While we relied upon prosecutorial discretion under the Biden administration to stop deportations of many clients, this remedy has been eliminated,

leading to increased delays in the resolution of non-detained proceedings. This requires more staff time for research, litigation, and advocacy—and over a longer period.

Outreach and public education are important components of our work defending the rights of immigrant New Yorkers, as ICE detention impacts all New Yorkers – the immigrant themselves, their families, their communities, their workplaces, their support networks, and other loved ones. Our offices will collaborate with long-standing local partners to offer legal technical assistance, Know Your Rights resources, and will continue to build upon community-facing resources to help us educate New Yorkers about ICE detention and what they can do. In 2018, we developed [We Have Rights](#), a series of animated films in eight languages³ to help immigrants know what to do when confronted by ICE in the most common situations. This website has taken on a renewed purpose in 2025. In the coming months, we will share WeHaveRights.us and written materials with local immigrant community-based organizations in New York City.

II. Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI)

BDS’ Immigrant Community Action Project (ICAP) team of attorneys, DOJ-accredited representatives, social workers, and support staff serve people in non-detained removal proceedings and applications for immigration benefits, including family-based applications for lawful permanent status, humanitarian-based applications, U & T visas, Special Juvenile Immigrant Status (SIJS), DACA renewal and other related immigration applications. ICAP works to strengthen New York City’s families, particularly mixed-status families, by taking on the most challenging immigration cases and providing legal services for people with multi-system involvement with the goal of identifying opportunities for lawful immigration affirmative protections.

BDS’ ICAP staff serves as first responders providing essential immigration legal support to New York immigrant communities in complex immigration matters in a rapidly changing legal immigration landscape. Through internal referrals from our criminal, family, and civil justice practices, we identify clients that have on-going removal proceedings and are able to step in to provide full representation and advocacy. Our clients meet us at a highly stressful point in their lives, when they are accused of a crime, face the loss of custody of their children or are in deportation proceedings. In these initial meetings with our clients, BDS staff are trained to identify collateral legal issues that our clients may need assistance with in addition to the primary matter. Many of the people we represent in our criminal and family defense practices have immigration legal issues they need assistance with. Our internal referral system allows us to meet multiple legal issues for the people we serve through one central screening process. We also can identify affirmative immigration remedies for people who may not have sought immigration legal services

³ English, Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, Russian, Haitian Creole, Urdu, and French.



and assist the people we represent, and their families, with securing lawful status and alleviating the fear and trauma of family separation.

We encounter recently arrived immigrants in both our criminal and family defense practices, many of whom are already ensnared in the immigration system. Attorneys must advise clients how to navigate filing a change of address with the immigration court while in the shelter system. Many of these clients have immigration court dates set in other cities, requiring change of venue motions. We also must step in quickly to file asylum applications. Our practice has also seen an increase in requests for assistance with family visa petitions to reunite families where children or other family members have remained in their home country and seek to reunite them (such as I-730s for derivatives of asylum seekers or I-130 visa petitions for spouses, parents, and children abroad).

We continue to expand services to meet our clients' needs and have renewed our focus on enforcing our low-wage immigrant worker's rights; both as a remedy and as an essential element of our immigration practice aimed at deferred action for labor-based claims for our clients. We have seen dozens of clients whose employment claims may lead to meaningful immigration relief, including deferred action and work authorization, administrative closing of removal proceedings, and the exercise of prosecutorial discretion where it would otherwise not be possible.

The backlog for non-detained immigration court persists and has created unpredictability in case trajectory, inefficiencies in case management, and prejudicial consequences for the respondents left in limbo who are often separated from their families. Most affirmative immigration applications used to be considered straightforward, based on the evidence submitted with the application. Requests for evidence are now more frequent, invasive and time-consuming. Changes such as these resulted in a steep increase in erroneously rejected applications, applications rejected for empty boxes on forms, or simply—and most often—for the government's failure to read the applications and review the evidence submitted. While these practices frustrate practitioners and delay applications, *pro se* applicants who lack the legal skills or resources to navigate the system are left without recourse and without immigration status.

During our representation of clients in removal proceedings, if there is an immigration benefit that requires an affirmative application, such as an immigration benefit through USCIS that the judge does not have jurisdiction over, our ICAP team can assist with these applications. Our team can also assist with affirmative immigration applications, such as green card renewals, citizenship, petitions for other family members, and employment authorization, after relief is granted in a removal case. These critical immigration services comprise BDS' non-detained immigration legal and social services and are a necessary component of supportive immigration assistance for people in New York.

BDS is requesting \$200,000 in funding through the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative to bolster our ability to provide direct immigration legal services and know your rights training to Brooklyn residents.



This increased funding is needed to serve New York City's immigrant communities and will help BDS continue providing legal screening, advice, and direct representation to low-income immigrants in their pursuit of affirmative immigration benefits.

Conclusion

The City Council has played a critical role in safeguarding New York City's immigrant communities and established itself as a national leader in the creation of the NYIFUP program. We are grateful to this Committee and the Council for your commitment to maintaining our status as a sanctuary city. BDS has worked to protect the rights of the people in our communities for nearly 30 years, but the need for our services is more acute than ever. We are proud to partner with the Council on initiatives like NYIFUP and look forward to continuing our work together. Your support of BDS' requested discretionary funding will ensure we can continue to provide high-quality legal services to immigrant New Yorkers.

We thank the New York City Council for your continued support of low-income immigrant New Yorkers. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to Anya Mukarji-Connolly, Managing Director of Policy & Advocacy at amukarjiconnolly@bds.org.



Testimony

New York City Council Immigration Committee

New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026

Thursday, March 6, 2025

Submitted by Co-Directors Margaret Martin & Kelly Agnew-Barajas

Immigrant and Refugee Services Catholic Charities Community Services, New York

Good afternoon, Council Chair Avilés and members of the New York City Council Committee on Immigration. I am Margaret Martin, Co-Director of Immigrant and Refugee Services, joined today by my fellow Co-Director, Kelly Agnew-Barajas. We represent Catholic Charities Community Services, Archdiocese of New York (CCCS). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today regarding the work of Catholic Charities with immigrants and refugees in New York City.

INTRODUCTION

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

- Catholic Charities is a leading provider of high-quality immigration legal services. Each year, Catholic Charities provides legal representation, consultations, and individualized pro se assistance to approximately 14,700 documented and undocumented immigrants, many of whom are in removal proceedings in immigration court. Of those, Catholic Charities represents more than 2,500 adults and families in immigration cases.
- Catholic Charities is one of the largest providers of legal services and case management for unaccompanied children, providing know your rights presentations and legal screenings to nearly 4,000 youth annually and representing more than 620 children in their immigration cases.
- Catholic Charities operates three immigration legal information hotlines, including New York City's MOIA Immigration Legal Support Hotline, that together serve more than 160,000 people annually.
- Catholic Charities is one of the five official refugee resettlement providers serving New York City. Catholic Charities welcomes and integrates more than 2,300 refugees, asylees and humanitarian migrants per year – providing intensive case management, workforce, education and health services.
- Catholic Charities' Day Laborer programs focus on job safety for day laborers, trainings, employment support and wage theft protection advocacy for more than 2,000 day laborers and their families each year.



- Catholic Charities provides English language instruction at all learning levels as well as citizenship preparation to more than 1,000 learners per year.

OUR WORK AND NEEDS TODAY

Immigrant communities in New York City face mounting challenges on multiple fronts. With Donald Trump in office, undocumented and documented New Yorkers are rightfully anxious about their immigration status and fearful to access basic public services including sending children to school, going to the emergency room, and calling 911. Some immigrants with temporary status such as parole and Temporary Protected Status, who thought they had some security, now face the loss of their livelihoods and potential deportation from the U.S. Providers like Catholic Charities that have built robust and diverse programming to support immigrants now face loss of federal funding.

At this critical time, it is essential that New York City make the investments and structural changes needed to strengthen and stabilize services that support immigrants. When the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) was established in 2002, it was the first chartered office in the United States dedicated to immigrant needs, with its initial goals focused on increasing access to programs and benefits and advising the mayor on legal service needs. MOIA's portfolio has grown well beyond those early objectives over the past 23 years, yet the current structure does not adequately support the administrative needs. CCCS recommends that the City Council evaluate the organizational capacity of MOIA, including the way that MOIA is obligated to contract through City agencies to fund immigrant service providers, and assess the feasibility of transforming MOIA into a standalone agency.

Catholic Charities urges the City to ensure more stable, well-funded services, building greater reliability into contracts and awards. First, we recommend more multi-year contracts so that providers can plan for longer-term programming and staffing rather than revisit funding for vital programs each year. While discretionary funds are welcome and help providers expand in response to need, it is difficult to plan programs and retain staff based on year-to-year funding; for example, it is extraordinarily challenging for organizations to commit to legal representation in one-year contracts, given that most immigration cases last well over a year. Also, we urge timely notification of awards, including renewals, so that awardees can strategically plan to ensure the most effective services for client communities. Additionally, it is critical that the City process claims in a timely manner for the financial stability of the City's nonprofit partners. Finally, we urge the City to build the increased costs providers face each year into awards, so that nonprofit partners are not required to choose between supplementing City awards and asking staff to work beyond capacity.

Catholic Charities implores City leaders to act and speak in ways that align with New York values and current laws. Safeguarding the due process rights of immigrants – including ensuring that local authorities adhere to policies that limit information-sharing based on racial or linguistic profiling – is more important than ever.



We urge the City Council to:

- Advocate for timely announcement of awards for the new MOIA Legal Support Centers, applications for which were due last October. With the program scheduled to replace extended ActionNYC programs on July 1, Catholic Charities and other applicants cannot plan their staffing or programming before announcements are made.
- Ensure multi-year contracting and funding increases for Catholic Charities' Haitian Response Initiative (HRI). HRI is a unique, culturally and linguistically responsive program that redresses the disparate legal treatment and lack of resources provided to the Haitian immigrant community. HRI is particularly critical in this time of attacks on Haitians and restrictions on their pathways to immigration status.
- Continue support for the MOIA Immigration Legal Support Hotline to provide critical legal information and referrals to New Yorkers. Consider multi-year contracting, yearly increases, and timely notice of renewal and funding amounts.
- Continue support of the Immigrant Opportunity Initiative's Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative to provide services in partnership with community-based organizations for immigrant New Yorkers in hard-to-reach communities. Provide for yearly increases to ensure the health and sustainability of partner organizations.
- Continue support for The Legal Aid Society's Immigrant Opportunity Initiative, of which Catholic Charities is a subgrantee providing legal representation in removal defense and other cases for particularly vulnerable and underserved communities. Provide for yearly increases to ensure the health and sustainability of partner organizations.
- Expand support of Catholic Charities and other ICARE coalition members to provide legal assistance to vulnerable children and their families. ICARE funding has remained flat for years, such that each year providers can take fewer cases for legal representation; with a significant increase in funding, Catholic Charities will provide full representation to many more children.
- Continue the critical support of the Catholic Charities and our fellow members of the Day Laborer Worker Initiative to provide safety training, outreach, and referral services for workers on construction sites in New York City.
- Ensure ongoing support for the Adult Literacy Initiative and the Adult Literacy Pilot which supports English Language Learners.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

MOIA Legal Support Centers, formerly ActionNYC in Schools

March 2025

Since April 2016, through the program formerly known as ActionNYC in Schools, CCCS has provided high-quality immigration legal services in 129 NYC public schools in all five boroughs. This initiative has served vulnerable and often isolated populations in accessible, familiar neighborhood schools, offering Know Your Rights sessions, consultations, and representation to students, families, school employees, and other community members. For nearly a decade, the CCCS team has worked with schools to meet emerging needs, such as those stemming from shifting migration, geopolitical changes, the pandemic, and federal immigration policy changes. The team has helped thousands of young immigrants understand their rights, options, and responsibilities, so that they can make informed decisions about their cases and futures. The program also has helped protect thousands of immigrant New Yorkers from immigration fraud.

In late 2023, MOIA announced it would end all ActionNYC programs in December 2024. MOIA released the RFX for a new Legal Support Centers (LSC) model in July 2024, scheduled to launch on January 1, 2025, with awards to be announced in November. Although the new LSC is an inadequate replacement for ActionNYC, for reasons raised repeatedly by many providers, CCCS submitted a timely proposal. In late October, following multiple extensions of the proposal due date, MOIA pushed the LSC start date to July 1, 2025, and extended existing ActionNYC programs by six months. In the meantime, many of our ActionNYC staff left CCCS or transferred to another department. To date, the LSC awards have not been announced.

The ongoing uncertainty, extending back more than a year, has negatively impacted our staff, clients, and ability to serve future clients. The shifting timeframe has significantly restricted our services for schools and individuals, as we did not plan to provide services for this entire school year; we began winding down the ActionNYC program, at MOIA's request, several months ago.

We urge the City Council to advocate for CCCS and other providers by pushing MOIA to publicly announce the RFX awards imminently, allowing providers to plan responsibly for staff, clients, and community partners.

Value and purpose of program for immigrants:

- Provides co-located legal services for immigrant youth and their families throughout the



NYC school system, in close partnership with public schools.

- Offers vulnerable children and their families a path to permanent residency, community integration, and economic success.
- Ensures that older youth do not age out of Special Immigrant Juvenile Status eligibility.
- Connects young immigrants and families with social services, including health insurance registration, access to health care, English-language learning, cash and food assistance programs, safe housing, vocational training, and job assistance.
- CCCS has served more than 9,800 immigrant youth, families, and school community members through ActionNYC.
- Since January 2022, we have provided more than 1,700 consultations to recently arrived immigrants in removal proceedings.
- The team has filed more than 2,554 cases with USCIS, New York State family courts, and the immigration courts.

Value of program for New York City:

- Ensures that students and their families have access to legal services within the safety and familiarity of their community schools.
- Addressing students' immigration needs significantly improves their education and employment prospects.
- Strong linkages between CCCS legal services and public schools ensure that children do not fall through the cracks in securing immigration legal status. DOE staff learn to pre-screen and refer students and families to help ensure that young people do not miss urgent case deadlines.
- Stronger social supports that come with immigration services contribute to the safety of immigrant youth, the school, and the neighborhood.
- Principals, assistant principals, guidance counselors, community school representatives, and parents are engaged in the effort to expand access to justice for immigrant youth.
- Trusted school partners communicate with CCCS about factors that may impact students' ability to share important details during legal consultations, a collaboration that can make the difference in a legal case.
- Children who will age out of SIJS eligibility in as little as two weeks are prioritized by CCCS lawyers, who are experts in age-out and complex cases.
- CCCS has robustly responded to the changing landscape of immigration law and policy to protect the rights of immigrant children and other New Yorkers.
- CCCS is prepared to continue legal services for vulnerable immigrants in collaboration with community partners under the LSC RFx.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

Haitian Response Initiative

March 2025

Since 2021, CCCS's Haitian Response Initiative (HRI) has provided critical services to a historically underserved group by connecting Haitian immigrants to free, safe, high-quality immigration legal services in their communities and their preferred language. CCCS and nine community-based organizations form the HRI Coalition, which provides participants with wraparound services. CCCS provides legal screenings, community-based legal clinics, individualized pro se assistance, and representation. Participants also have access to direct aid and resources for employment, housing, and other necessities.

The city's support for HRI shows a strong commitment to this community. However, the funding is insufficient to meet community needs or cover CCCS's costs to run the program. While HRI staff work long hours, HRI currently has over 1,800 people on its waitlist; funding covers only two attorneys and one accredited representative to assess and accept cases for representation. In mid-2024, recognizing the demand for services and value of HRI to the community and NYC, MOIA asked CCCS to partner with organizations in the Bronx and upper Manhattan to expand legal services for Haitians; MOIA committed ASLAN funding for this purpose. At the same time, other HRI funding remained flat, with no increases to support cost of living or other CCCS expenses. Moreover, HRI is a yearly contract, and CCCS typically receives renewal notice just before the contract date, with final funding determined after that, significantly restricting our ability to plan staffing and programming to best serve the community.

Given the ongoing demand for services and changes in federal policy, the uncertain funding and last-minute notifications are an impediment to best serving this vulnerable community, particularly as their needs change and increase. For example, last month the new administration terminated the humanitarian parole program for Cubans, Nicaraguans, Haitians, and Venezuelans, and shortened the recent extension of TPS for Haitians. The NYC community of more than 160,000 Haitian immigrants is understandably fearful of what these changes will mean for them, and hundreds are turning to CCCS for help. HRI will play a crucial role in helping these New Yorkers determine their options for maintaining lawful status and continued work authorization, as well as ensuring that they do not fall victim to immigration fraud.



We urge the City Council to increase the funding and long-term structure of HRI contracting, including yearly increases, so that we and other Coalition members can better plan critical programming and respond to the need.

Value and purpose of program for immigrants:

- All program staff, many of whom are Haitian immigrants, are fluent in Haitian Creole, ensuring that services are provided in a linguistically and culturally sensitive manner.
- HRI bridges the gap in access to legal services for the Haitian immigrant population, which is historically underserved and experiences worse outcomes in immigration cases than many other populations.
- A range of legal services is available through clinics, pro se assistance, and representation.
- HRI can adjust services quickly based on urgent needs such as approaching case deadlines, to help clients avoid missing deadlines and important benefits.
- Partnerships among CCCS and trusted community-based organizations ensure that clients can access a full range of services and more quickly understand their legal cases.
- Since January 2022, HRI has screened over 1,300 Haitian immigrants, filed 1,673 immigration applications, and accepted 194 cases for full representation.

Value of program for New York City:

- Widely known and trusted in the Haitian community, CCCS often is an early stop for newcomers seeking legal information, pro se assistance, and other services within days of arriving in New York.
- With legal protections for Haitians under attack, HRI will be the first place many in the community will turn for help.
- People served by HRI regularly return again and again for assistance understanding their rights and obligations.
- Haitian immigrants have prompt access to legal services, ensuring that applications for immigration relief and benefits such as work authorization are filed expeditiously.
- The HRI Coalition members coordinate to disseminate accurate, up-to-date, and valuable legal information to the Haitian community.

Risk to Catholic Charities clients:

- The Haitian immigrant community, including CCCS clients, would lose access to a vital resource for quality legal services.
- Current clients would be referred elsewhere, with a low likelihood that their cases would be accepted given the current capacity of New York City legal services providers.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort // ICARE

March 2025

ICARE was established in 2014, with Catholic Charities as a founding member, to ensure protections for vulnerable young people in New York; it provides critical legal support to thousands of unaccompanied children and families, helping them achieve permanence and stability. ICARE has been a successful model for providing meaningful, high-quality legal services to more than 14,000 children and families. Catholic Charities' ICARE program benefits from internal referrals to our other legal services programs for families and children, including the MOIA Legal Support Center, our large Unaccompanied Children Program, and the Family Group Legal Orientation Program.

Since 2021, immigrant children and families have traveled to the United States in record numbers. Nearly 110,672 unaccompanied children crossed the border in Fiscal Year 2024; and, according to the Office of Refugee Resettlement, approximately 3,500 of those were reunified with sponsors in NYC. While NYC has a robust nonprofit immigration bar, most of these children and families with young children will not find legal representation.

The New York City Council has been a consistent supporter of ICARE for more than a decade. The need for City support is greater than ever. Given the precariousness of federal funding for children – briefly paused nationwide in February, impacting a large and successful CCCS program – and the likely cancellation of other important programs for children and families, including those successfully run by CCCS for many years; as well as expected changes in immigration law that will impact children and families, CCCS urges the City Council to increase support for ICARE. A significantly increased investment in CCCS's ICARE program will enable providers to take more cases for full representation and prevent unnecessary deportations of children.

Value and purpose of program for immigrants:

- Through high-quality legal services, children and families who are newcomers to the U.S. have a pathway to residency, social integration and stability, and economic success.
- More than 90% of cases avoid deportation with an ICARE attorney.
- Young immigrants and families are connected to social services, including school registration, health insurance registration, access to health care, English language learning,



and vocational training and job assistance.

- With ICARE funding, CCCS has represented over 600 children and adults with children in court proceedings since 2014, with more than 90% of the cases resolved favorably.
- CCCS provided legal services to over 840 children and families last year through ICARE.

Value of program for New York City:

- NYC has been a national leader in protecting children from deportation. Investing in ICARE reflects that New York City values and is ready to protect its children and respond to humanitarian crises impacting them.
- CCCS's ICARE program benefits from internal referrals our other legal services programs for families and children, which often are able to take cases the ICARE team cannot.
- Since 2014, ICARE has helped more than 14,000 children and families and represented 3,000, more than 1,500 of whom have obtained relief and a pathway to stability and permanence in New York City.
- The stronger social supports, including work authorization and access to benefits, that come with legal services for youth and their families strengthen our neighborhoods and communities.
- Next year, we will assist at least another 500 children and families with children with increased ICARE funding. With the requested funding increase, we will be able to represent many more children in their immigration cases.

Risk to Catholic Charities clients:

- Without this funding, more than 1,200 children and families would not receive assistance next year.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

**Immigrant Opportunity Initiative -
Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative (IOI - CILEC)**

March 2025

Since August 2016, CCCS has received funding through the city's Immigrant Opportunity Initiative as a member of the Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative (CILEC), a coalition with TakeRoot Justice, Catholic Migration Services, and Make the Road New York, to provide a range of immigration legal services to indigent New Yorkers. CILEC partners with grassroots organizations to reach underrepresented immigrant groups in New York City, accepting referrals from seven groups that serve different communities: African Communities Together, Chinese Staff and Workers' Association, Damayan Migrant Workers Association, Desis Rising Up and Moving, National Mobilization Against Sweatshops, New Immigrant Community Empowerment, and Workers' Justice Project. CCCS and CILEC coalition members also accept case referrals from other city-funded programs, the Mayor's Office for Immigrant Affairs, and the Human Resources Administration. Attorneys provide legal consultations and representation in a variety of cases.

The CILEC IOI programs are more critical than ever given the Trump Administration's efforts to restrict due process rights and foreclose avenues of relief for all immigrants, even those with lawful status. The demand for these legal services will continue to increase while CILEC consortium members continue to operate over capacity. Yearly increases that recognize providers' true costs are urgently needed to enable CILEC providers to meet the demand for services.

Value and purpose of program for immigrants:

- Immigrant New Yorkers, particularly those in hard-to-reach communities that trust and turn to CILEC's base-building partners, receive wraparound services.
- Both legal and employment legal services are provided through CILIC, including representation by CCCS in complex immigration cases not available through the MOIA Legal Support Center (formerly ActionNYC) network.
- CILEC services help immigrants to understand their legal options and pursue immigration relief with expert legal representation.
- Catholic Charities has served 2,964 New York City residents through CILEC. Many of these individuals have been assisted with multiple cases and would have been left without legal assistance if not for the CILEC coalition.



Value of program for New York City:

- For more than eight years, CILEC has provided effective immigration legal and employment legal assistance to thousands of the city's immigrants.
- By partnering with grassroots, base-building groups, CILEC legal partners serve hard-to-reach communities through one-on-one lawyering, community clinics, and workshops.
- Free legal services provided through CILEC protect vulnerable communities from falling prey to immigration services fraud.

Risk to Catholic Charities clients:

- Without this funding, approximately 1,000 cases would be orphaned.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

Immigrant Opportunity Initiative - The Legal Aid Society (IOI – LAS)

March 2025

As an IOI subcontractor with The Legal Aid Society (IOI-LAS), Catholic Charities provides legal representation to low-income immigrants, with a focus on immigrant families, underserved immigrant communities, children, and survivors of domestic violence or human trafficking. The IOI-LAS partners working together provide community outreach, immigration legal services, , and case management in furtherance of goals that include: providing legal services to low-income immigrants; strengthening immigrant families and communities; addressing poverty and inequality through facilitating access to justice, including for low-wage immigrant workers; supporting immigrant workers' rights and ensuring equal workplace standards; and building and strengthening partnerships between community immigrant service providers and legal services agencies. CCCS services are provided in partnership with our internal Pro Bono Program to leverage the private bar in serving NYS's most vulnerable immigrants.

The IOI-LAS programs are always critical, but now than ever given attacks on immigrants that include efforts to restrict due process rights and foreclose avenues of relief for all immigrants, especially recent arrivals and those in removal proceedings. The demand for IOI-LAS legal services continues to grow while partner organizations already operate over capacity; yearly increases that recognize providers' true costs are urgently needed to enable IOI-LAS to meet the demand for services.

Value and purpose of program for immigrants:

- Provides quality legal representation to vulnerable unaccompanied children and adults with minor children in removal proceedings, significantly increasing the likelihood of success in immigration court.
- Immigrant New Yorkers are represented in a variety of cases (e.g., asylum, U visa, VAWA, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status), putting them on a pathway to permanent residency, social integration, and economic success.
- Ensures that pro bono legal representation is high quality by providing close mentorship and supervision.
- People who do not qualify for IOI-LAS services are referred to other, internal Catholic Charities programs and to other reputable legal services providers.



- Catholic Charities represents low-income immigrants in more than 285 cases each year, through in-house services or pro bono placement that includes close mentorship and supervision.
- Since 2018, Catholic Charities has represented vulnerable New Yorkers in over 879 cases.
- More than 230 cases have been represented by pro bono partners from the New York City legal community.

Value of program for New York City:

- Immigrants in New York, particularly those that are most vulnerable or from underserved communities, receive high-quality legal representation in immigration court and other immigration cases.
- Clients are placed on a pathway to stability and economic success, including the ability to access benefits and other supports.
- Quality representation ensures that vulnerable immigrants are not taken advantage of by fraudulent actors in their immigration cases.
- Catholic Charities' partnership with trusted New York City law firms and pro bono lawyers increases legal representation capacity through case placements and mentorship, with more than 100 currently active legal volunteers.
- Pro bono engagement expands our ability to place cases on tighter timelines, such as asylum seekers with impending filing deadlines and young people who are age-out risks.

Risk to Catholic Charities clients:

- Loss of this funding would result in approximately 180 orphaned cases.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

MOIA Immigration Legal Support Hotline

March 2025

Funded by the City through the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA), the MOIA Immigration Legal Support Hotline (formerly known as the ActionNYC Hotline) provides valuable information about immigration benefits, directs callers to the MOIA website for policy updates and Know-Your-Rights resources, and makes referrals to free and safe city-funded legal service providers throughout the five boroughs. Knowledgeable CCCS attorneys regularly train and update hotline staff on legal developments to ensure they provide the most up-to-date and accurate information. The hotline is a crucial resource for New York immigrants to obtain relevant information and get connected to reputable legal immigration help. Counselors can assist callers in 200 languages.

Value and purpose of program for immigrants:

- Calls are promptly answered and each person's unique needs addressed by directing callers to the appropriate city- and state-funded programs, escalating urgent matters, and guiding individuals with limited technology skills in using automated systems.
- Callers receive information about immigration law and policy relevant to their situations.
- Connecting callers to trusted immigration legal service providers reduces the likelihood that immigrants are taken advantage of by fraudulent practitioners.

Value of program for New York City:

- Since 2016, the hotline has served over 264,000 callers.
- In 2024, CCCS helped meet the increased demand for information, responding to more than 54,000 calls and supporting NYC's efforts to welcome recent arrivals as members of the ASLAN partnership.
- The hotline stopped making appointments for the ActionNYC program in November 2024 as part of MOIA's transition away from the ActionNYC; counselors continue support immigrant New Yorkers by directing them to the MOIA website, making referrals to providers, and helping callers navigate complex immigration procedures.
- CCCS, through partnerships with MOIA, ONA, and media, holds phone banks to increase public understanding of immigration issues; in Fiscal Year 2025, two phone banks helped more than 500 callers to protect themselves from immigration fraud, protect their rights



when encountering ICE, and access reputable services.

Risk to Catholic Charities clients:

- Tens of thousands of New Yorkers would lose access to referrals, general information, and resources each year. People who would otherwise receive accurate information from the hotline will be taken advantage of by fraudulent actors.
- In the absence of a hotline, CCCS and other legal service providers would need to divert critical resources and time to address increased walk-ins and callers to legal programs.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

Day Laborers Program

March 2025

In the Bronx, CCCS works to engage, advance, and strengthen the community of day laborers. CCCS works in coalition with five other organizations in the Day Laborer Workforce Initiative to collectively maintain and expand day labor centers in all five boroughs. These centers provide job placement, workforce development, and occupational safety training, wage theft prevention services, workers' rights training, and referral services to low-income day laborers. Workers' centers across New York City are at the front lines delivering essential services to day laborers and their families in high-need areas. Worker centers have proudly delivered food and emergency cash assistance, trained workers in Site Safety training and emergency preparedness, and have helped day laborers improve job security through job dispatching. These centers have also connected day laborers to other essential services such as housing support and rental relief, and legal services to address wage theft and immigration needs.

Value and purpose of program for immigrants:

- Provides workforce development and job assistance to vulnerable community members who are targets of wage theft and disproportionately experience dangerous and abusive working conditions.
- Provides essential training for immigrants – such as the city-mandated 40-hour Site Safety Training, OSHA trainings, workers' rights, and Disaster Preparedness trainings.
- Connects immigrants to vital resources to aid in community integration, improve job opportunities, and receive legal protection through Know Your Rights trainings, connections to immigration legal consultations, and English language instruction.
- Assists in recovery of stolen wages and other claims relating to workers' rights violations. These claims are often never pursued due to undocumented workers' fear of retribution from employers and a lack of knowledge of their rights. Workers are even more fearful now to make claims under this administration.
- Provides of a thriving center which is a safe and dignified community for immigrants to access workforce supports and services.

Value of program for New York City:

- Since 2016, the City has been a national leader in ensuring the protection of day laborers and has consistently expanded its support and resourcing for this programming over the



years.

- The City's investment ensures that day laborer centers can conduct Site Safety Trainings to comply with Local Law 196. This law, created to address the rise in construction-related deaths in the city, mandates a total of 40 hours of construction safety training for all workers. The city has made a significant investment in an online platform to be able to deliver these training courses in a safe, remote environment.
- However, as many of the workers lack technological training and have limited access to digital access at home, Catholic Charities has implemented a blended model of safe in-person and online training to reach communities and assist them to develop computer literacy skills.
- Without this assistance, these communities and workers would be unable to access trainings that are linguistically and culturally competent and would be unable to secure work.
- Creating safe and dignified centers for day laborers ensures that workers do not have to utilize public spaces – which can often be unsafe – to access work and can contribute to the NYC economy as they build their livelihoods. This need is even more acute now, given targeted immigration enforcement and the ejection of workers from Home Depots across the city.

Risk to Catholic Charities clients:

- As Catholic Charities is the leading organization serving day laborers in the Bronx, a loss of funding would create a vacuum for vital services and trainings to day laborers in this borough, the borough with the highest rate of poverty in NYC.
- Without funding the more than 2,000 workers seeking to enhance their skills would lack access.
- Wage theft cases – already under-reported – would go unaddressed.
- Funding supports employers seeking to fill positions and allows New Yorkers to be self-sustaining and live dignified lives.
- Without training on their rights and lacking a safe place to wait for work, more workers would wait for work in public spaces and would be vulnerable to being targeted by immigration enforcement, being detained, and ultimately separated from their families.



**Immigrant and Refugee Services
Catholic Charities Community Services**

NYC Council // Budget Priorities

English for Speakers of Other Languages

March 2025

There are currently over 2.2 million adults in NYC who have limited English language proficiency or who do not have a high school diploma. Despite the need for adult literacy programming, in FY25 the Adams administration cut funding for literacy programs funded through DYCD from \$17M to \$12M. The Mayor's Preliminary Budget for FY26 also includes this reduction.

Over the past four years, with funding from the Adult Literacy Pilot Project Initiative and Council Discretionary funding, CCCS has successfully enhanced our ESOL classes by providing comprehensive supports that keep learners engaged with our program and offer practical guidance to achieve their immediate and long-term goals. Funding from the City Council has helped us provide ESOL programming to 110 students YTD in FY25.

CCCS greatly appreciates the support from the Council and calls for the continuation of the Discretionary funding (Adult Literacy Pilot and Adult Literacy Initiative) at its current total level of \$16.5M. CCCS requests that the administration double the baseline funding for adult literacy programs funded through DYCD from \$12M to \$24M in FY26, especially given the risk to and possible loss of federal funding streams for adult learners in the city.

Value of Programming: The NYC Adult Literacy Pilot Project, created by the NY City Council, provides increased funding per student to increase outcomes and create stronger programs. Our Pilot Program Outcomes include:

- Increased access to legal and social services
- More thorough educational development
- Expanded learning options
- More culturally responsive/sustaining education.

Although our program site is in downtown Manhattan, we serve students from all five boroughs (36 Council districts as of January 2025) and from many different countries and cultures. This diversity in the clients we serve give our students a chance to speak English as much as possible and interact and connect with classmates from cultures other than their own, which for many of them is a rare occurrence in their daily lives.



Without the continuation of both the discretionary and Adult Literacy Pilot funding, 111 CCCS students would lose their classes, 780 instructional hours in total. We would also not be able to provide the 250 hours of individual support and more than 120 referrals to benefits and resources available to adult learners (i.e., training programs, healthcare options, housing, etc.) and legal, educational and training, and social services.



Center for Family Life in Sunset Park

**Testimony on MOIA's Immigration Legal Support Centers
Committee on Immigration 3.6.25**

Center for Family Life in Sunset Park (CFL) is a neighborhood-based social service organization that has been the principal provider of integrated social and human services in the low-income community of Sunset Park, Brooklyn for over 45 years. In fact, CFL was one of the original grantees of ActionNYC in 2015, when we piloted the program to provide a broad range of immigration legal services to our community. Since then, the program, now known as the Immigration Legal Support Centers, has remained a key resource for Sunset Park residents, the vast majority of whom are immigrant families.

Every year, CFL provides immigration legal services to hundreds of clients including the completion of legal screenings and assistance in the preparation of applications. During Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024, funding from the program enabled CFL, in partnership with Lutheran Social Services of New York, to screen about 1,300 individuals for immigration relief and to file 353 cases, out of which 298 were approved! Since 2018, our services have also included MOIA-funded outreach initiatives including Know Your Rights workshops which have engaged thousands of participants throughout Brooklyn.

The difficulties and challenges faced by the families we serve are as varied as the families themselves. And cases can last years before they reach a happy conclusion. Take for example Marisol's story. Marisol was referred to our team of Immigration Navigators by a colleague at one of CFL's after school programs. After a screening and legal consultation to discuss her eligibility for a U-Visa, the staff attorney assessed that Marisol could indeed apply for a U-Visa for herself and petition for her older children who resided in Guatemala. Because of the trust built through her participation in our other programs, Marisol did not hesitate and quickly provided us with her supporting documents. We began working with her to prepare the necessary forms and filed her U-Visa petition in March 2016. It is typical for a U-Visa petition to take several years to be approved. The Covid-19 pandemic delayed her case even further. Our team remained in contact with Marisol during this time to provide updates and support.

Then, on July 28, 2021, Marisol received a notice from USCIS that her U-Visa was approved. She received her Employment Authorization approval along with USCIS correspondence stating that her children's supplemental cases remained in process. Despite the hardships Marisol experienced during the pandemic, she remained hopeful. Marisol remained in contact with us for the latest updates on her case and received other services at CFL including benefits screening and enrollment, employment services, food pantry services and emergency funds to meet concrete needs.

Finally, after more than eight years, USCIS approved Marisol's older children's petitions. She received her older children's approvals in November 2023. The Navigator shared this great and life-changing news with Marisol in person. Both rejoiced, and Marisol cried for this long-awaited moment. She quickly made a virtual call to her children in Guatemala to share the news. All cheered with excitement. And on March 21, 2024, Marisol, her spouse, their twin daughters, and the CFL Navigator met her older children at the airport. After eighteen years of separation, the family were finally reunited.

As you can observe from Marisol's story, CFL offers a holistic suite of services to meet our community's needs. In addition to immigration legal services, our comprehensive range of wraparound family and social services also includes a food pantry, benefits access, job readiness training and job placement, ESOL classes, tax preparation, cooperative business development, family counseling, afterschool and summer camp, youth employment, college readiness, and other services designed to meet the pressing needs of our low-income, low-wealth immigrant community, serving more than 15,000 children and adults each year. We have served as an anchor in our community and a highly trusted resource for information and support.

Over CFL's 45+ years of experience serving immigrant families across our portfolio of services, we have observed that the most common barriers faced by immigrant populations include: a lack of awareness regarding the availability of public City services; concerns about relinquishing citizenship in their native countries particularly in cases where dual citizenship is not permitted; linguistic barriers; distrust of widespread immigration legal service-related scams and bad actors charging onerous fees to complete governmental application forms; fear of information disclosure, and the fear and mistrust of those perceived as outsiders to isolated communities; and the general lack of awareness for services not communicated in hard-to-reach languages. Sunset Park is a diverse and densely populated neighborhood in South Brooklyn, home to large Latinx and Chinese immigrant populations who make up much of our clientele. 23% of residents and 25% of neighborhood children live below the poverty line and 30% of households are enrolled in SNAP and other public benefits support programs.

We are grateful for the decades-long collaboration and support CFL has enjoyed with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs or MOIA, and we appreciate the unwavering leadership of Commissioner Manny Castro, particularly during these trying times. Sunset Park residents are feeling the fear and anxiety that to various degrees has always existed among low-income immigrant communities. However, in the last several weeks the sense of dread and despondency has become even more palpable. And the risks are very real.

Now more than ever, the Immigration Legal Support Centers Program provide solutions and a path forward for many immigrant families. Know Your Rights Workshops provide critical

information, shared by a trusted community partner, that is quite literally essential to the safety and wellbeing of our community neighbors. We shudder at the idea that funding for these key services could be imperiled, and we beseech the city administration and the City Council to not only maintain funding but to increase it.

As it stands, we are already facing a possible cut from 3 Immigration Navigators to 2 due to reductions included in the new version of the contract per the most recent RFP released by MOIA. Our team currently sees an average of 60 cases per month and carries anywhere up to 200 cases on a wait list. We cannot stress enough how damaging cuts to the program would be.

Take the example of Jasmine, who made an appointment for an intake consultation with one of our Immigration Navigators in March 2024. Jasmine and her family are from Honduras and were able to meet with a bilingual and bicultural Navigator, expressing relief with finally obtaining an appointment for assistance after a long search for availability. In Honduras, the family feared for their life after being threatened by a well-known gang and extorted for money to continue operating their family business. They fled Honduras to come to the US for safety. Once in the US, the family successfully filed for Asylum. Jasmine and her husband wanted to apply for employment authorization as soon as possible, but it took months for them to get the appointment.

Our team helped the family gather the necessary documents and within 3 months we filed an I765 (Application for Employment Authorization) for Jasmine and her husband. The family was concerned about the pending application because their housing was not stable due to residing in a shelter. However, the Navigator assured them that because the CFL office address was used as their mailing address, the documents would arrive safely. Every day we see that something as apparently simple as a stable mailing address can be life-changing for a family. In June 2024, the family received their employment authorization and social security cards. Jasmine and her family expressed how grateful they were for a quick and smooth process, and their appreciation for the navigator and the Immigration Legal Support Centers program. As with Marisol, Jasmine and her family are also receiving assistance from CFL's Benefits Access team and Employment Services.

An increased investment in the Immigration Legal Support Centers will enable CFL and partner providers to better meet the current demand and serve more immigrant New York families. These are our neighbors, friends and families. We appeal to you to work with us in advancing our mission of enhancing the stability and well-being of the families of Sunset Park. We stand ready to do more if you can provide the financial resources. Please know that your support is not just a funding decision—it's a commitment to the stability, wellbeing, and prosperity of our community.

CENTRAL AMERICAN LEGAL ASSISTANCE

Ayuda Legal Para Refugiados Centroamericanos

240 Hooper Street Brooklyn New York 11211 Tel: (718) 486-6800 Fax: (718) 486-5287

Heather Axford, Director
City Council Committee on Immigration
March 6, 2025

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

Our office provides advice and counsel to over 100 immigrants every month and we are taking on as many cases for full representation as we can handle on top of our already full docket of removal defense cases. In recent years we have seen an increase in Venezuelans and Nicaraguans fleeing brutal authoritarian governments as well as Colombians fleeing the most recent iteration of a half a century long internal armed conflict. I am deeply proud of our small team. We are in court every week and have continued to win asylum for our clients even in the weeks since January 20, 2025. It feels like grabbing them from the mouth of a shark these days. We have renewed TPS status for over 600 of our long time Salvadoran clients who have been in TPS status since 2001 (seemingly the only group to have their TPS renewed so far- our Venezuelan, Honduran, Nicaraguan, and Haitian clients face imminent termination of their status). Our attorneys are in court representing new and long-time clients every single week that the courts are open. In addition, we have been responding to local public schools desperate for “know your rights” trainings for staff and students. This is a training that is more important and more complicated by the day as the current administration takes the position that immigrants have no rights.

The funding we receive from City Council year after year: As members of the ICare coalition representing asylum seeking families facing removal; through IOI which supports not only our removal defense work but the very important family reunification and adjustment services that we do for our clients after they win asylum; the discretionary funding we get from our local Council Member Gutierrez that supports our 5 days a week intake line where immigrants in removal can talk to an actual person about their situation, gives us the security to know that we can hire and keep our incredible legal, paralegal, and support staff doing this work day in and day out.

In the past several years, non-profit organizations and institutions like law schools, universities, private firms, and the City, have pivoted to increase *pro se* assistance as we stretched to help a large number of newly arrived immigrants to satisfy urgent filing deadlines and get on the path to work authorization. CALA has collaborated with our partners at Unlocal, Catholic Migration Service, NYLAG, VIA and Masa to reimagine how we can provide the most urgent services like timely filing and supporting Asylum Applications and putting people on the path to

obtaining work authorization to as many people as possible as quickly as possible. The Robin Hood Foundation, the New York Community Trust, and subsequently the City through the Mayor's Office on Immigrant Affairs, have provided us with the necessary support to pilot the Pro Se Plus Project (PSPP) which uses a combination of community education, training, staff and volunteers to assist recently arrived immigrants to obtain urgent advice and counsel and timely file and support their Asylum Applications, making them eligible to get work authorization. In 2025, we continue to provide urgent advice and counsel, applications and motions assistance, and increasingly community education (both general know your rights trainings as well as trainings focused on trial preparation for pro se asylum seekers with upcoming final hearings). We meet at least once, sometimes more, per week to share information among the community organizations and the legal service providers regarding new policies and practices by the government and how it is being experienced in the community. This way our community organizations are armed with the information they need and legal service providers get constant feedback about what the community needs going forward.

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

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

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

Heather Axford
Director
haxford@centrallegal.org



Testimony of Juan Diaz, Jenny Veloz and Caitlyn Passaretti
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Submitted to The New York City Council Subcommittee on Immigration
Preliminary Budget Hearing - Immigration
March 6, 2025

Thank you, Chair Avilés, and members of the Committee on Immigration for the opportunity to submit testimony at this hearing regarding FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing on Immigration.

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

Over half of New York City households have at least one immigrant parent. New York City immigrant and mixed-status families already face far more barriers to access to services and programs due to language and eligibility criteria. A recent [CCC](#) report revealed that immigrants are five times more likely than citizens to lack health insurance. The same reports highlighted that immigrant children are enrolled less in early childhood education programs than their peers and English Language Learners in public schools have the lowest passing rates in state tests.ⁱ

The actions of the federal administration have already done far-reaching harm to New York's immigrant communities. Heightened ICE enforcement, rescinding guidelines deterring ICE from conducting raids in "sensitive" locations like churches and schools, and attacks on sanctuary cities are just some of the federal actions that have directly impacted the lives of immigrant communities in our city. Fear of deportation has led children to stop attending schoolⁱⁱ, and families are afraid to access health services and other essential benefits they are eligible for.ⁱⁱⁱ Moreover, proposed federal funding cuts to programs like SNAP and Medicaid will even further limit access to life-saving programs for mixed-status families.

Now more than ever, New York leaders must fund programs that support immigrant communities and help counter the effects of federal funding cuts and heightened immigration enforcement. We urge you to take the following actions in the CFY26 Budget to support the needs of New York's immigrant children and families.

City Investments

Housing Supports

CCC is a steering committee member of the Family Homeless Coalition (FHC), a coalition comprised of 20 organizations representing service and housing providers, children's advocacy organizations, and people with lived experience with family homelessness. We are united by the goal of preventing family homelessness, improving the well-being of children and families in shelter, and supporting the long-term stability of families with children who leave shelter.

We urge city leaders to take the following steps to support immigrant communities:

- Implement and fund the CityFHEPS expansion, which would significantly remove administrative and eligibility barriers and would expedite access to housing support for families in the community and in shelters, regardless of immigration status.
- Eliminate the 60-day rule for migrant families with children. 60 days is not sufficient time for shelter staff to work with families to secure public benefits assistance and find permanent housing, and migrant students often miss weeks of school due to mid-year transfers. As such, the 60-day rule should be eliminated to provide sufficient time for migrant families with children to gain self-sufficiency and thrive.
- Invest \$625,000 for Youth-specific Immigration Legal Services for young people within the Runaway and Homeless Youth system.

Enhance Legal Services and Community Outreach

- Invest \$80 million for Legal Services for Migrant Families. We urge the City Council to advocate for more legal resources to prevent family separation and more suffering for migrant children and families.
- Baseline \$5 million to maintain the citywide Community Interpreter Bank (NYC Interpreter Bank)
- Baseline \$4 million in funding for Immigrant Family Communications and Outreach at the Department of Education

Early Care and Education

- Baseline \$25 million for Promise NYC for children ineligible for other child care vouchers due to immigration status.
- Protect 3K and PreK – which are essential free ECE options available to immigrant families – by taking the following steps:
 - Restore and baseline \$112 million for 3K programs
 - Restore and baseline \$25 million for ECE Extended Day Expansion

- Restore and baseline \$5 million for outreach and education regarding Early Care and Education options, and enhance community-based, multilingual outreach to immigrant communities
- Restore and baseline \$55 million for Additional Special Education Pre-K Classes

Enhance Economic Security

- Invest \$3 million in Workforce Development Programming for immigrants.
- Expand Fair Fares to 200 FPL and baseline \$54.2 million, to ensure that all low-income families have access to public transportation

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to working together to support the needs of New York City's immigrant families.

ⁱ Citizens' Committee for Children of New York. "Keeping Track of NYC Children's: 2024". 2024

ⁱⁱ <https://www.chalkbeat.org/newyork/2025/01/24/trump-immigration-policy-and-deportation-fears-affect-attendance-for-immigrant-families/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://maketheroadny.org/advocates-health-providers-look-to-ease-immigrants-fears-of-accessing-care-under-trump/>



**Chinese-American Planning Council
Testimony Before the Committee on Immigration
Chair, Council Member Alexa Avilés
March 6th, 2025**

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

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

To that end, we are grateful to testify about the issues that greatly impact our immigrant communities.

According to the [Asian American Federation Data Center](#), Asian American Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) are the fastest growing population in New York, making up 18% of the population in the city and growing and 65.7% of Asian American population are foreign born.

The largest AAPI ethnic groups in New York include: Chinese (755,983), Indian (405,833), Korean (145,335), Filipino (142,006), and Bangladeshi (86,228), but there are over 25 distinct ethnic groups and languages spoken by AAPI New Yorkers. AAPIs experience some of the highest rates of Limited English Proficiency with a rate of 43.9%.

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

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

- Community members who use SNAP benefits have asked if they think SNAP benefits will be cut, because they rely on them to feed their families. Community members have asked if they should withdraw from SNAP benefits because it might make their data



available to the Federal government, and despite being citizens, they are concerned about the impact it might have on their families.

- Many community members asked should pull their children (citizens) out of school because of fears that ICE will enter the school property. For one of our school programs, we run a monthly teen night, which does different educational and academic workshops as well as opportunities for young people to socialize and build connections. 100 young people attended our teen night in early January, a typical attendance. In early February only 40 young people attended. When asked about their friends' whereabouts, the young people said their parents were scared for them to leave home and wouldn't allow them to attend.
- Multiple community members have asked if they should not go to immigration appointments or to doctors appointments to protect their physical safety.
- One community member came from China through the southern border of the US with her partner and had a baby in New York. Her partner was abusive and she had to take out a restraining order to protect her and the baby. She has now been asking about whether she needs to marry her partner to reduce her chances of getting deported under the Trump administration. CPC was able to work with her to provide in-language support and get her a lawyer through free legal programs, but these programs have long waiting lists, especially for Asian languages.

We are demanding that the City prioritize the wellbeing of immigrants in our community. We can no longer afford cuts and austerity budgets that disproportionately impact working class communities of color. The federal administration has created an environment of fear and uncertainty for many immigrants, with policies that not only threaten their safety but also their fundamental rights. In light of this, it is our duty as a City that was founded and run by immigrants to step up and protect those who call our city home. We must invest in community-based support systems that can help immigrants navigate these trying times. This includes legal aid services, mental health resources, and direct access to essential services such as housing, healthcare, and education. These resources are vital for ensuring immigrants are not left to face these challenges alone, and they provide a pathway to stability and dignity in an increasingly hostile environment.

Promise NYC

At CPC, we have been providing child care through Promise NYC and legal services to asylum seekers, as well as adult literacy classes, emergency food services, and benefits navigation. One mother enrolled in our Promise NYC program explaining that she and her children came to the US in order to escape life-threatening shortages of medications that they faced in Venezuela. Her oldest child would have died without access to medications and treatment. There simply was no time to wait given the long immigration processes and therefore is now seeking asylum. She is relying on PromiseNYC so that she can access childcare for her children, and thus access employment and income to support her family. CPC enrolled our full allocation of Promise NYC slots well ahead of the deadline, and there are hundreds of families waiting for slots. We must live up to our values as a sanctuary city and provide the resources for our newest neighbors to find permanent housing and work. We are urging the City to ensure



that the adopted budget includes at least \$25 million funding for this critical program, and that it is baselined going forward to give families much needed stability.

Adult Literacy

For our community members, English language skills are needed to navigate healthcare, support a child's education, access a job and engage fully as a member of our city. The contextualized learning helps adult learners improve their English language communication skills, but also helps them acclimate to their new home, understand their rights, and gain access to supports and services that empower them and their families.

We urge the City to restore \$14 million for the Adult Literacy Initiative and \$2.5 million for the Adult Literacy Pilot Project to ensure that all New Yorkers have the chance to strive for economic mobility.

Legal Services

Cultural barriers and the political climate are making it both increasingly important, and increasingly difficult to access legal services. Many of CPCs community members have a deep sense of fear around issues of immigration, housing, and employment, but struggle to find a lawyer that speaks their language or can provide culturally competent services. We consistently have community members coming to seek legal services, yet there are very few Asian American legal services available.

We urge the New York City Council to prioritize linguistically and culturally appropriate legal services for immigrant New Yorkers, and to ensure that CBOs that have trust with those communities are funded to carry out those legal services. We also urge the City to invest at least \$10 million in emergency legal services for new immigrant asylum seekers.

Asylum Seeker Support

Asian American and Pacific Islanders have the highest rates of undocumented status of all racial groups. In fact, according to [NBC News](#), there is a growing number of Chinese migrants entering the Southern border. Many of these migrants are either fleeing from oppressive regimes and/or war-torn countries that have been escalated due to decades of failed American foreign policy. CPC has been serving asylum seekers from around the world, and we have been hiring Spanish-speaking staff to meet the needs of Venezuelan asylum seekers through emergency food services, legal support, ESOL classes, benefits enrollment and housing assistance. We have a moral obligation to provide the support and assistance to these migrants and social service agencies have been filling in those gaps. The City cannot pit newly arrived asylum seekers against immigrant New Yorkers at large, we must fully and robustly fund necessary services for all New Yorkers. This includes supporting permanent, affordable housing for newly arrived asylum seekers and investing robustly in adult literacy, safety net services, workforce development and more.



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



CUNY Citizenship Now!

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March 6, 2025

**The New York City Council - Committee on Immigration
Testimony by Meetu Dhar, Managing Attorney, CUNY Citizenship Now**

Thank you, Chairperson Aviles and honorable members of the Immigration Committee, for holding this meeting at a time when immigrants need our assistance more than ever. My name is Meetu Dhar, and as the Managing Attorney of the City Council Program for CUNY Citizenship Now, I am here on behalf of our Interim Director, Monique Francis, and the staff of CUNY Citizenship Now, to advocate for funding for immigrant legal service providers.

CUNY Citizenship Now! (CN!) has been a beacon of hope and support for thousands of immigrants in New York City. Since the expansion of services to NYC Council Members in 2010, we have assisted over 74,000 immigrants by providing free, high-quality, and confidential immigration services. As frontline providers, we serve constituents from all 51 NYC Council districts and provide in-person assistance at Council Member district offices and community-based organizations throughout the city. We also provide remote services to those immigrants who request virtual appointments. Our program serves as a lifeline for immigrants who want to remain in the United States and build a better future in New York City.

In the last fiscal year, CUNY Citizenship Now assisted close to 5,000 New Yorkers. In addition to our large-scale citizenship events sponsored by Council Members, constituents receive one-on-one consultations with our multilingual legal staff on immigration matters and assistance with completing applications for in the areas of naturalization and family immigration. These services are provided free of charge, ensuring that financial barriers do not prevent individuals from accessing the help they need.

Under the new administration, there has been an increase in deportations carried out by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), creating fear within the immigrant community. Reports indicate that, on average since January 20th, ICE has removed 9,400 immigrants per week, with plans to increase these numbers. Additionally, the rapid onslaught of Executive Orders and policy changes has caused confusion, leading to turmoil and panic in the community. Many immigrants are finding themselves in harrowing situations, unsure of their rights and options. To address the needs of constituents, CUNY Citizenship Now is presenting on immigrant rights in the current environment. Additionally, CUNY Citizenship Now is providing accurate information, legal assistance, and the support immigrants need to make informed decisions about their immigration matters.

The demand for our services continues to grow exponentially. Our current funding will not allow us to meet these increased needs. We are seeking \$5 million in funding for fiscal year 2026—a restoration of our current \$3.1 million allocation and an enhancement of \$1.9 million—to ensure that CUNY Citizenship Now has the necessary resources to meet the increasing demand and continues to be able to deliver crucial services to the community. This funding will allow the program to expand services at a time when it is needed most, including offering additional Know Your Rights presentations, providing an extra day of service to Council Members, creating a hotline, and holding more citizenship events throughout the city. Additional funding will also enable the program to enhance our outreach efforts, ensuring that more New Yorkers are aware of the free services available to them and can access the help they need.

We urge you to continue supporting funding for immigration services. Together, we can ensure that invaluable programs like CUNY Citizenship Now continue to provide the support and services that so many New Yorkers rely on.

Thank you for your time and consideration



**Preliminary Budget Hearing Testimony on behalf of Dancewave, Inc.
New York City Council Committee on Immigration | March 6, 2025
Presented by Nicole Touzien, Executive Director**

Chair Avilés and Members of the Committee, thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony, which I am providing on behalf of Dancewave.

Dancewave is a 29 year old nonprofit dance education organization that provides direct services to an all-ages audience of over 6,200, and connects with upwards of 24,000 people via digital engagement efforts each year. Since 2001, we have provided an average of 120 programs annually as a contracted vendor for NYC Public Schools. Our programs directly serve and impact the lives of immigrant youth, including the over 40,000 new migrant children who have arrived in New York City since 2022. Our NYC School partners rely on us consistently; we fill persistent gaps in both curricula and staffing, providing inclusive and empowering dance education to young people who would otherwise go without.

Dancewave works closely with each of our 50+ school partners to strategically and thoughtfully adapt curriculum to meet the unique needs of each school community. We hire highly trained and multilingual arts educators who model Dancewave's values of inclusivity and restorative justice both inside and outside of the classroom. Our programs increase multicultural literacy, strengthen students' social and emotional learning skills necessary for life success, and promote community belonging -- all necessary elements for young people to feel heard as active members of their class community.

Dancewave is one of over 1,000 arts and cultural organizations in New York City that steadfastly serves and delivers for the people of New York, fully inclusive of our vibrant immigrant communities. Our work is made possible by -- and will only continue with increased investment from -- the City. **I ask for the committee's full support in advocating for increased and baselined arts and culture funding in the amount of \$75M for FY26** so that we can continue to deliver for our immigrant community members. This investment is necessary for the future health and vibrancy of New York City, and will provide innumerable mental and physical health, public safety and economic benefits to our community.

Thank you,

Nicole Touzien
Executive Director



TESTIMONY

Fiscal Year 2026 Preliminary Budget Hearing:

**“New York City’s Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative:
Worker Cooperatives—Meeting the Moment, Lifting Up Immigrant Workers and
Entrepreneurs to Build a Stronger New York”**

Presented to

New York City Council, Committee on Immigration
Hon. Alexa Avilés, Chair
Thursday, March 6, 2025

Prepared By:

Anh-Thu Nguyen
Director of Strategic Partnerships

New York City Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative

Democracy at Work Institute

254 36th Street Suite C-308
Brooklyn, NY 11232

Good afternoon, Chair Avilés and distinguished members of the New York City Council Committee on Immigration. It is an honor to address you all as I submit testimony in support of the hardworking worker-owners in our communities. My name is Anh-Thu Nguyen and I am the Director of Strategic Partnerships at Democracy at Work Institute, a member of the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative (WCBDI).

Thanks to City Council's investment over the last ten fiscal cycles, WCBDI has provided significant benefit to aspiring business owners and cooperative small businesses. Our initiative creates and support resilient employment and business ownership opportunities unlike any other in New York. We provide critical support to small business, workers, and recent migrants, connecting them to business ownership and employment opportunities, including when alternative routes to employment and business ownership are unavailable. Our work puts agency and assets in the hands of workers and their communities.

Some key achievements in the past few years have included:

- The successful launch of Afrilingual, an interpretation and translation cooperative that provides language support in over 10 African languages.
- The establishment of Radiate Consulting, a professional services consulting cooperative that builds capacity for immigrant services organizations and small businesses, led by professionals with deep experience in these spaces and who come from those communities themselves, which has doubled in size and reached profitability within two years of launch.
- The development of a rapid response cooperative toolkit in English and Spanish for community based organizations to make cooperative business entrepreneurship more accessible and inclusive.

Since its inception in Fiscal Year 2015, WCBDI has:

- Created more than 1000 jobs and pathways to business ownership.
- Created more than 200 new worker cooperative businesses that offer higher hourly wages, better working conditions and importantly, build wealth and equity for workers.
- And reached more than 10,000 entrepreneurs with education and technical assistance services.

Amidst ongoing economic volatility, low-income and immigrant New Yorkers are in need of support more than ever. We are familiar with navigating and thriving in times of crisis, as our small business support has helped scale and strengthen the cooperative ecosystem in NYC, being inclusive of all workers, especially immigrant workers. In COVID times, we expanded our services, grew our membership in alignment with increased demand, and moved more than \$20M in emergency funding to help small businesses thrive. Over the past year, our services have been in high-demand and especially impactful as a tool for providing services to the city's newer migrant workers.

Worker cooperative businesses are unique in their ability to establish, grow, and retain community wealth, to make entrepreneurship accessible, and to create stable, dignified work. They are a haven for workers in low wage, high turnover, and often exploitative industries who have been traditionally marginalized and excluded from the broader economy. In NYC, the majority of worker-owners are immigrant women of color in industries like janitorial services, home health care, and child care. Through worker ownership, these individuals are bringing home living wages, building assets that contribute to financial stability, building worker power and leadership, and transforming industry standards for the better over time.

It is critical to continue the work that we are doing to improve worker protections, offer a means to build and root wealth in local communities, and sustain and grow the diversity of the small businesses in NYC for the next generation.

We urge City Council to continue investing in worker cooperatives in NYC, through enhancing WCBDI funding to \$5.09 million for FY26. This will provide for the start-up of 31 new worker cooperative small businesses and over 100 new jobs, as well as offer technical assistance and education reaching over 2000 existing, start-up, and aspiring cooperative entrepreneurs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.



Testimony: Hamra Ahmad, Head of Legal Programs and Policy
Hearing: City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026
Host: Committee on Immigration
Date: March 6, 2025

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

Support from the City Council helps Her Justice to provide direct representation and skilled advocacy in an arena that often fails to adequately serve the legal needs of the marginalized. In this moment of volatile change, as in ordinary times, legal services are essential services. Every day, our staff attorneys provide women with information about the legal remedies available to them and advise and strategize with clients to help them weigh their options and decide the course that is right for them and their children. We hope that the City Council will reaffirm its support for and partnership with organizations like Her Justice in recognizing legal services as essential to ensuring immigrant survivors' economic well-being and safety.

Organizational Background

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

Community outreach. Her Justice also works to ensure that women living in poverty in New York City are knowledgeable about their legal rights and available remedies, reducing barriers to access to justice. We use a targeted, culturally sensitive community outreach strategy that involves conducting informational and know-your-rights presentations and capacity-



building trainings for community-based not-for-profit organizations. Prospective clients learn of our services from colleagues at legal and social services agencies throughout New York City, including the Family Justice Centers, bar associations, elected officials' constituent services offices, court and law enforcement personnel, schools, shelters, hospitals, our website, LawHelp.org and word of mouth. The "Get Help" section on our website provides women and their advocates with easy access to information about their legal rights and detailed instruction about how to secure free legal assistance from Her Justice through our online intake application. Her Justice staff also conduct presentations to community-based organizations across New York City to provide organization staff and their clients with information on various legal issues and ways to access legal services at Her Justice.

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

Providing Legal Assistance to Immigrant Women Living in Poverty

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

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

Reaching Vulnerable Immigrants in Community

To reach vulnerable immigrants in New York City, Her Justice will continue to build our replicable outreach model that combines capacity-building for local offices, know-your-rights events for District office constituents, and targeted legal clinics. We know that in a climate of heightened immigration enforcement, the best way to reach foreign-born clients can be to partner with trusted community-based offices, nonprofits and District offices. Her Justice engages in capacity-building training for local providers – especially where they do not have legal staff – with a focus on those programs that



serve communities particularly isolated by culture or identity. This training ensures that staff and advocates can provide basic legal information and make informed referrals to Her Justice and other providers. Additionally, we deliver know-your-rights events, which include educating women in the community about civil options in family and matrimonial law and immigration remedies. All community services are responsive to local language and cultural needs.

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

Advocating for System Reform

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

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

Work Authorization and Economic Stability. Her Justice knows that our immigration clients – and all immigrant New Yorkers – make remarkable contributions to and are part of the very fabric of our City. In 2023, Her Justice published a policy research report, *Stories from Immigrant Survivors of Gender-Based Violence: The Impact of Work Authorization*, which brings forward the experiences of immigrant survivors seeking legal permission to work in the United States and explores the impact on their lives – as women, mothers, and workers – of obtaining work authorization (employment authorization documentation or "EAD"). The majority of Her Justice immigration clients are mothers raising families in New York City and contributing mightily to our City's economy. The wave of new migrants and asylum seekers arriving in the U.S and in New York City shed new light on the role of immigrant workers in the United States, yet many work without the legal protections that would match the value of their contributions to the economy.



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

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

Respectfully, [REDACTED]

Hamra Ahmad, Esq.
Head of Legal Programs and Policy
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NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION
Preliminary Budget Hearing – Committee on Immigration
March 6th, 2025

Thank you to the City Council, Immigration Chair Aviles and the Committee on Immigration for their attention to the 2026 fiscal budget cycle. I am submitting testimony on behalf of Hot Bread Kitchen, an organization that promotes economic mobility for women and gender-expansive people, immigrants, and people of color through job training and placement, food entrepreneurship programs, and an ecosystem of support in New York City, using our city's vibrant food industry as a catalyst for career growth. This year, we will continue our efforts to provide workforce training for New York's asylum seeker population.

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

Hot Bread Kitchen offers our members several programs to reach economic mobility:

1. Workforce Training
 - a. Culinary Fundamentals: our signature 100-hour training focuses on culinary fundamentals and professional readiness, then aids in direct job placement and layers on customized retention services.
 - b. First Course: In partnership with NYC Department of Small Business Services, in 2023, we launched First Course, an upskilling program which enables food workers to gain additional skills leading to higher wages and career advancement.
 - c. Front of House Training: in 2024, we launched training and job placement for customer-facing roles in the food industry, which offer higher starting pay rates than back of house roles. Front of House Training placements averaged \$22 per hour last year, and job placement rates from our second cohort of the program were some of the highest across our organization in 2024.

2. Job Placement: We place all workforce training graduates into a high-quality job through our 270+ employer partners. Of those actively seeking employment in 2024, we place 99% of members in jobs in hospitality and food service sectors.
3. Human Services: As part of our support and retention program and our community-building efforts, we ensure that members have access to any assistance they need to start work confidently and safely– we offer wraparound support services in the form of MetroCards, support accessing childcare vouchers and affordable housing, referrals to health services, case management, etc.
4. Small Business Incubation: We have helped incubate nearly 300 food businesses to date, mostly owned by women of color. Through our HBK Incubates program, we provide technical assistance, mentorship, access to markets, subsidized commercial kitchen space, and access to capital to food entrepreneurs of color.

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

We are renewing our efforts to seek the Council's support this year as we work diligently to execute the second year of one of our newer workforce training offerings, **Culinary Career Pathways for New New Yorkers**. With the arrival of an unprecedented number of migrants and asylum seekers in New York City, Hot Bread Kitchen is meeting this urgent moment of need by connecting these communities to career pathways in New York City's vibrant food industry. In 2024, Hot Bread Kitchen developed and launched this program by adapting our standard Culinary Fundamentals training curriculum to provide targeted services for this new population. In 2025, Hot Bread Kitchen seeks funding to build upon the success of this program in its second year.

Our first cohort of the 2025 New New Yorkers program is beginning this month, and, to illustrate the need, we have received 500 applications for 30 spots to date. Given the significant demand for this year's initial cohort, we anticipate the need for continued support for additional cohorts throughout the year. Furthermore, this year, we will launch a transitional employment program for graduates, which will strengthen job placement outcomes for New Yorkers. **We are thus seeking the Council's support in FY26 specifically for the continuation of this needed program, and ask for your support for our \$100,000 Welcome NYC Initiative Funding and \$100,000 Support for Women Immigrant Workers Initiative requests.** We believe it is imperative for our organization and our City to continue to create pathways to economic opportunity for our newest New Yorkers as they establish new homes in our great city.

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

On behalf of Hot Bread Kitchen, I respectfully urge the Committee on Immigration to support our application for funding for this important training. Thank you for your attention to this important issue and investment in Hot Bread Kitchen's work and community.

Respectfully,

Kathleen DiPerna, Director of Strategy



Defend Their Future: Fund Legal Services for Immigrant Children

Who We Are: ICARE is a coalition of legal service organizations dedicated to expanding access to legal representation for immigrant children facing deportation in New York City, while advocating for universal access to counsel.

The Challenge: Every year, thousands of children—some as young as infants - appear in NYC immigration courts without an attorney. New York ranks 4th nationwide in unaccompanied arrivals released to sponsors, yet many must face the system alone.

Most of the children and families we represent are fleeing extreme violence, trafficking, and persecution, seeking safety in the U.S. Without an attorney, they have only a 15% chance of winning their case. With ICARE representation, their success rate jumps to over 90%.

At the same time, immigration court backlogs have hit record highs, leaving children and families in legal limbo for years. Federal policy shifts have created new legal hurdles, requiring providers to expand services to meet emerging needs. Without City Council's continued investment, thousands of children will be left to represent themselves, leading to deportation and life-threatening consequences.

What We Do: With City Council's help, ICARE provides **free legal services** for immigrant children and families fighting deportation in NYC. Our services include: **Know-Your-Rights trainings, legal screenings, direct representation** and **connections to city & social services**, ensuring vulnerable New Yorkers don't face the immigration system alone.

Our Impact (Since 2014)

Screened over
14,000 children for
relief

Represented over
3,000 children

Obtained relief for
1,500 children

Secured over \$24M in
public funding for legal
services

ICARE FY26 Discretionary Funding Request: \$6,297,250

Despite overwhelming demand, ICARE providers have not received a funding increase in six years. This year's funding request is the difference between safety and deportation for 2,013 children and families.



No child should face
the immigration process alone



In partnership with:

CENTRAL AMERICAN LEGAL ASSISTANCE



THE
LEGAL AID
SOCIETY



KIND
KIDS IN NEED OF DEFENSE

Human
Rights
First



TESTIMONY

New York City Council Committee on Immigration
FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing

Delivered by:
Sierra Kraft, Executive Director, ICARE Coalition
March 6th, 2025

Good afternoon, Chair Avilés and members of the Committee on Immigration thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sierra Kraft, and I am the Executive Director of Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort (ICARE), a coalition of seven legal services organizations dedicated to ensuring that unaccompanied immigrant children in New York City have access to free legal representation. Our members, Catholic Charities Community Services, Central American Legal Assistance, Human Rights First, Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), Legal Aid Society, The Door, and Safe Passage Project, are on the frontlines of this work every day, fighting to ensure that no child has to face the immigration system alone.

We are calling on the City to meet this moment and expand its investment in legal services for unaccompanied children.

Right now, thousands of immigrant children in New York are stuck in legal limbo, waiting years for their cases to be resolved. Nearly 7,000 unaccompanied children arrived here last year alone—fleeing war, trafficking, and gang violence. Instead of finding safety, they are thrown into an immigration system so complex that even trained attorneys struggle to navigate it. Yet, these children—some as young as toddlers—are expected to stand before a judge and argue their own case against a government prosecutor. Without an attorney, they have just a 15% chance of success. With an ICARE attorney, that number jumps to over 90%.



Despite the critical need, legal services for unaccompanied children remain dangerously underfunded. Just two weeks ago, a sudden federal stop-work order temporarily froze all funding for unaccompanied children's legal services nationwide. Although the order was rescinded within 48 hours, it was a wake up call: these protections can disappear overnight. The federal government has made it clear that funding for immigration legal services is unpredictable, politically vulnerable and clearly not enough. With ongoing threats of mass deportations and additional funding cuts at the federal level, New York must step up to protect young immigrants and ensure their legal rights are not dependent on an uncertain federal landscape. **We cannot gamble with children's futures.**

At the same time, the immigration court backlog is at an all-time high. Cases that once took months now stretch on for years, leaving children in legal limbo—unable to move forward with their education, employment, or sense of stability. The backlog also puts an enormous strain on legal service providers, who are being forced to stretch already limited resources, making it harder to take on new cases or provide the comprehensive representation that these cases require. We are at a breaking point: without increased city investment, thousands of children will remain unrepresented and at risk of deportation, homelessness, trafficking, and exploitation.

For over a decade, the City Council's investment in the Unaccompanied Minors and Families Initiative has been a lifeline. ICARE providers have represented more than 14,000 children and families. These legal services don't just help children navigate court—they create pathways to stability and opportunity. They allow kids to enroll in school, access healthcare, and build a future here in New York. Legal representation changes lives.



But while the need continues to grow, city funding for unaccompanied children's legal services has remained stagnant for six years. At the same time, costs have risen, and demand has skyrocketed. ICARE providers are being forced to do more with less, while thousands of children remain on waiting lists for legal help. This is unsustainable.

That is why today, **ICARE is requesting \$6,297,250 through the Unaccompanied Minors and Families Initiative to support 2,013 children and families through legal screenings, know-your-rights trainings, direct representation, and referrals to essential social services.** This investment is not just about legal services—it is about ensuring New York remains a city that protects its most vulnerable.

New York has long been a place that stands for justice. But justice requires action. These children came here seeking safety, and we have a responsibility to ensure they have the opportunity for due process, and we cannot turn our backs on them now.

We urge the Council to meet this moment and expanding funding for unaccompanied children's legal services. Thank you for your time, I look forward to our continued partnership in making sure that New York remains a city of refuge, opportunity, and justice for all of our community members.

In Community,

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March 6th, 2025
Committee on Immigration
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

**NYC Council Committee on Immigration
I-ARC Testimony for Budget and Oversight Hearings on The
Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026
March 6th, 2025**

Good morning, members of the New York City Council. My name is Natalia Nunez Barragan, and I am the Senior Manager of Membership and Capacity Building at Immigrant ARC ("I-ARC").

Immigrant ARC is a coalition of over 80 legal service providers delivering services across the city of New York. Our mission is to increase access to justice and legal counsel for immigrant New Yorkers by mobilizing legal service providers and addressing systemic barriers to justice.

Since our founding, I-ARC has consistently emphasized the critical need for sustained funding for long-term immigration legal services. Access to free legal representation is essential for immigrants facing removal proceedings and seeking immigration benefits.

Today, our immigrant communities are under unprecedented attack—threats that weaken both our city and its economy. We have witnessed indiscriminate enforcement, illegal detentions, and racial profiling with arbitrary quotas mandating that the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers make 75 enforcement arrests per day, i. President Trump has ordered immigration authorities to detain individuals "to the fullest extent possible," significantly increasing the number of people held in ICE and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) facilities—facilities that government experts and federal courts have previously deemed "barbaric" and unconstitutional. This surge in detention further restricts access to attorneys, severely diminishing asylum seekers' chances of successfully fighting their cases. Every day, we see attempts to strip protections and status from those who have obtained them in recent years. In these circumstances—just as we saw under the first Trump administration—legal representatives are not just legal aid; they are lifelines for immigrant communities.

This is a call to action. These numbers represent an urgent need for intervention and support. Now is the time for New York City to step up and demonstrate its unwavering support for our immigrant communities. We must not retreat from New York's historic investments in immigration legal services. Instead, we have an opportunity to stand as a national leader in supporting our immigrant residents.

I-ARC recommends the following measures to ensure immigrants receive the long term legal assistance and language access programs according to the need we are experiencing:

1. **Invest \$25 million in immigration legal services** to provide continuity of representation and prevent vulnerable individuals from falling through the cracks of our complex immigration system. This funding will support the following city-wide initiatives:
 - **\$11.1 million for the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP):** The first-in-the-nation program providing free legal services to low-income New Yorkers facing deportation.
 - **\$6.3 million for I-CARE:** Funding to support over 2,000 unaccompanied children and families in removal proceedings.
 - **\$5 million for CUNY Citizenship NOW!:** A program offering free legal services to individuals on the path to U.S. citizenship.
 - **\$2.6 million for the City Council's Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI):** Assisting immigrant New Yorkers with their immigration applications.
2. **Invest an additional \$50 million in immigration legal services** to support technical assistance, pay parity, capacity building initiatives, and attorney and support staff positions to increase the ability of legal services to meet the needs of the moment while our immigrant communities are under attack by the Trump Administration..
3. **Allocate \$1 million for a pilot program providing wraparound case management services** for immigration legal services clients. This program would:
 - Bridge the gap in social services for immigrants seeking legal aid by allowing legal service providers to hire social workers to support individual cases.
 - Offer case management and representation assistance to help immigrants navigate housing, benefits, education, and healthcare systems.
4. **Reinvesting \$7.8 million in NYC's Community Interpreter Bank hosted by the NYIC.** We at I-ARC are proud to stand alongside the City and our partners in the language access space by supplying the Community Interpreter Bank with a Comprehensive Legal Terminology Guide and Legal Services Interpretation Trainings that include a Code of Ethics and Behavior Guide developed specifically for the interpreters of the Community Interpreter Bank.

The Community Interpreter Bank is extremely critical right now as the need for legal services has never been greater, and access to interpretation is an essential part of meeting that need. For immigrants navigating our complex legal system, access to quality interpretation isn't just a convenience—it's a lifeline. Language barriers are one of the biggest obstacles to accessing legal counsel, and for too long, too many immigrants have been unable to communicate with their lawyers or fully understand their rights. This interpreter bank directly addresses that challenge.

We choose to remain steadfast in our support for our city and its values. New York City has always been a home to immigrants—our greatest strength and resource. If we ensure that our immigrant communities receive the long-term services they need to succeed, our city will thrive alongside them.

As the federal government uses every possible tool at their disposal and weaponizes the entire US government against immigrants, our city must equally equip our neighbors with the fundamental tools and support they need to protect their rights, secure economic stability, and remain united with their families. Expanding and sustaining our immigration legal services programs is not just an ethical imperative—it is a lifeline for our communities and the backbone of our city's economy.

New York has long been a national leader in ensuring universal access to legal representation and a beacon for immigrants. Investing in our immigrant communities is not just the right thing to do—it is an investment in every New Yorker's economic prosperity. Immigrant New Yorkers create jobs, start businesses, and revitalize our workforce. Ensuring access to legal aid allows them to obtain long-term status, work authorization, and the resources needed to integrate fully into our cultural, civic, and economic life.

If we provide our immigrant communities with the long-term services they need to flourish, our city will flourish with them. The time for action is now. Let us reaffirm our commitment to a city where everyone—immigrant or not—can thrive, safely at home, in their jobs, and with their families.



March 7, 2025

New York City Council
Committee on Immigration

Re: File T2025-3034, Preliminary Budget Hearing - Immigration

Dear Members of the Committees on Immigration:

Kids in Need of Defense (KIND) respectfully provides the following written comment for the New York City Council on the March 6, 2025 joint hearing between the Committee on Immigration of File T2025-3034, Preliminary Budget Hearing - Immigration

Founded in 2008, KIND is a 501c3 nonprofit organization providing free legal representation to unaccompanied immigrant children who enter the U.S. immigration system alone. In all of KIND's work, KIND envisions a world in which every unaccompanied child on the move has access to legal counsel and has their rights and well-being protected as they migrate alone in search of safety.¹ KIND's holistic approach helps to address these traumas and critical needs, improving the overall well-being of youth by fostering resilience and establishing better child-centered practices. KIND's Social Services Team works with its Legal Programs Team to connect KIND's young clients to needed resources in order to foster their safety and stability and helps children and their families adjust to a new country, language, home, and community. With its 16 offices, KIND provides free direct legal representation, pro bono mentoring, and social services coordination for unaccompanied children. Since 2009, KIND's New York City office has served unaccompanied children in all five boroughs.

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

1) KIND's Recommendations

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

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

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

- the increased complexity and cost of delivery of services, and
- potential for an imminent and huge loss in federal funding for unaccompanied children’s legal services.

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

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

a) Unaccompanied children and their specific needs and challenges

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

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

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

b) New York City a top destination for unaccompanied children

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

b) ICE's announcement that they will target unaccompanied children and sponsors for enforcement

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

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

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

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

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

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

24,000 unaccompanied children who were previously released to sponsors in New York City to resume initiation of removal proceedings against them. With the immigration court system already overburdened, and an average case for an unaccompanied child taking over 3.5 years to complete, this will create even worse backlogs in the system and demand that legal service providers remain attorneys of record and stretch limited resources even further.

Increased ICE enforcement activity targeted at children means that their cases become even more complex and time consuming, as attorneys need to explain new risks, accompany children to ICE check ins, and monitor risk of detention. In tandem, changes in immigration court practice will leave children with pending status such as Special Immigrant Juvenile Status more vulnerable to having removal orders entered against them, rather than having their cases dismissed as in the past. This puts immense pressure on under-funded legal service providers to push forward existing cases with urgency, while addressing these ever-changing developments and challenges.

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

At a time when the need for secure, robust funding for legal services for unaccompanied children is greatest, it is in severe jeopardy. Last month, the Interior Department issued a stop work order to KIND and several ICARE members that receive federal funding for legal services for unaccompanied children.⁹ The order was rescinded,¹⁰ but this contract is up for renewal imminently,¹¹ and its future is extremely uncertain. Even if this contract is renewed for a year now, the future of federal funding for these services remains in peril, and it is incumbent upon the City Council to meet the moment to increase funding for unaccompanied children's legal services.

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

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

We commend City Council for its support of KIND and ICARE. However, during these uncertain times, creating a sustainable legal representation program requires the City to significantly raise the baseline of funding to account for the increased needs for providing expert, culturally-responsive, services for unaccompanied children. While the needs and numbers of unaccompanied children arriving in New York have risen steadily in the past, ICARE's funding has remained at a standstill for several years.

⁹ Didi Martinez and Julia Ainsley, "Legal organizations told to stop federally funded work for unaccompanied migrant children," Feb. 19, 2025, NBC News, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/legal-organizations-told-stop-federally-funded-work-unaccompanied-migr-rcna192828>.

¹⁰ See Daniella Silva, "Trump administration rescinds order to half legal aid for unaccompanied migrant children," NBC News, Feb. 21, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/trump-administration-legal-aid-unaccompanied-migrant-children-rcna193230>; Immigration Policy Tracking Project, "2.0 Trump Administration issues stop-work order for legal services providers representing unaccompanied minors," last updated Feb. 21, 2025, available at <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/reported-hhs-issues-stop-work-order-for-pro-bono-legal-service-providers-for-unaccompanied-minors/>.

¹¹ KIND, "KIND Praises Reinstatement of Vital Federal Funds to Protect Unaccompanied Children, Urges Administration to Continue Support for Child Protection," Feb. 21, 2025, <https://supportkind.org/press-releases/kind-praises-reinstatement-of-vital-federal-funds-to-protect-unaccompanied-children-urges-administration-to-continue-support-for-child-protection/>.

Renewed, multi-year, and sustained funding with annual adjustments is necessary to create a sustainable pipeline of high-quality attorneys in the field in New York City and programming that addresses the gaps in legal services for the community. This also requires that New York City understand the professional obligations of attorneys, as well as investing in our organizations to recruit, train, and sustainably maintain multilingual, trauma-informed, immigration trained attorneys that are licensed to practice in New York state and can navigate both state and immigration court systems.¹²

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

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

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

As discussed earlier, once these children have arrived in the United States, they are held in ORR custody, where they remain until they are released to adult sponsors and family members. Many unaccompanied children are released with little, if any, support or coordinated and localized services upon release.¹³ Federal support services, if provided locally, usually end when the young person turns 18. The landscape of patchwork, limited support can negatively affect children’s well-being and their meaningful participation in their immigration case—and left undocumented, these children can continue to be placed in vulnerable scenarios. As service providers, we have seen the harm that is inflicted upon children when they are released to communities that fail to provide the supports that they need to fully integrate and thrive.

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

KIND works to assist clients with basic stability—a requirement for a child client to be able to meaningfully participate in their legal case. Aside from benefiting their legal case, this holistic service model can also help our child clients thrive in other settings as well, such as school, home, in peer relationships, and other places. This type of individualized support that views the client as an entire person with needs outside of their immigration case is only possible when there is a dedicated,

¹² Specifically, one of the primary forms of humanitarian relief that unaccompanied children qualify for is Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), which requires a license to practice in state court in order to first obtain an order before subsequent filing with U.S. Citizenship Immigration Services (USCIS) is possible.

¹³ E.g., Jonathan Beier and Karla Fredricks, “Meeting the Medical and Mental Health Needs of Unaccompanied Children in U.S. Communities,” Migration Policy Institute and the American Academy of Pediatrics, April 2023, at page 24 24 in Box 3, available at <https://www.aap.org/en/advocacy/meeting-the-medical-and-mental-health-needs-of-unaccompanied-children-in-u.s.-communities>.

experienced social services professional working closely with an attorney together. Social services work itself involves multiple, complex systems.

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

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

Unaccompanied children and youth, particularly as they remain undocumented and in active removal proceedings, are uniquely placed in vulnerable situations that can lead to further harm. A series of articles in The New York Times reported on unaccompanied children working in exploitative and hazardous conditions.¹⁴ KIND's New York City office has served and continues to serve labor trafficked and exploited youth, and our Labor Exploitation Prevention Programs is working on know your rights materials, trainings, and advocacy on the issue.¹⁵ Ongoing investments in removal defense and immigration legal services for unaccompanied children remains one of the most effective ways for New York City to address child labor exploitation and trafficking. Addressing underlying complex and intersectional reasons that unaccompanied children may be labor exploited or trafficked requires solutions that increase these children's protective factors, such as increasing unaccompanied children's access to quality legal and social services by trusted attorneys and social workers. Attorneys are vital to unaccompanied children's comprehension of their legal rights, to securing these children's stability—and, where appropriate, lawful and safe employment—through immigration status, and to recognizing, and helping extricate children from, situations of exploitation. Social services providers can work with these youth to build on their protective factors and support them to access resources essential for the stability needed to safely engage in decisions about their education, work, and transition into adulthood. Without this coordination between legal and social services, unaccompanied children continue to face heightened vulnerability to abuse, neglect, exploitation, and trafficking in New York.

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

Sincerely,

Kids in Need of Defense (KIND)

¹⁴ E.g., the first article published by Hannah Dreier, *Alone and Exploited, Migrant Children Work Brutal Jobs Across the U.S.*, The New York Times, Feb. 25, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/25/us/unaccompanied-migrant-child-workers-exploitation.html>.

¹⁵ To access these materials generally, see Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), "Preventing Child Labor Exploitation," available at <https://supportkind.org/what-we-do/preventing-child-labor-exploitation>, last accessed Oct. 17, 2024.

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Sarah Nolan, Managing Director of KIND's New York City office
Oral comment provided at the hearing on March 6, 2024

- Good morning. My name is Sarah Nolan. I'm the Managing Director of Kids in Need of Defense or KIND's New York office. We are also here as members of the Immigrant Children's Advocacy and Relief Effort, or the ICARE Coalition.
- KIND thanks City Council for supporting ICARE in providing free legal representation to unaccompanied children. We are here today facing unprecedented challenges to our shared goal to provide a quality, ethical, and sustainable removal defense program for the unaccompanied children who are a part of our community.
- Unaccompanied children are now a *focus* of increased immigration enforcement activity. Last week, 10 ICE officers came to our teen client's residence and she was directed to appear for an ICE check in, when our client's toddler was served with papers to initiate removal proceedings against her. ICE confirmed they are targeting 24,000 unaccompanied children in New York City in this way.
- ICE enforcement activity against children means that their legal cases become even more complex and time consuming, as attorneys need to explain new risks, accompany children to ICE check ins, and monitor risk of detention. In tandem, changes in immigration court practice will leave even children who have pending applications for status more vulnerable to deportation.
- This puts immense pressure on under-funded legal service providers to push forward existing cases with urgency, while addressing these ever-changing developments and challenges.
- At a time when the need for secure, robust funding for legal services for unaccompanied children is greatest, it is in severe jeopardy. Last month, the Interior Department issued a stop work order to KIND and several ICARE members that receive federal funding for legal services for unaccompanied children. The order was rescinded, but this contract is up for renewal imminently, and its future is extremely uncertain. Even if this contract is renewed for now, the future of federal funding for these services remains in peril, and it is incumbent upon the City Council to meet the moment and increase funding for unaccompanied children's legal services.

- Data shows that immigration judges are almost 100 times more likely to grant legal relief for unaccompanied children with legal counsel than those without. KIND’s model of holistic legal and psychosocial support results in increased stability for unaccompanied children and safeguards them against human trafficking and exploitation. Given this backdrop and the critical impact of KIND and ICARE in securing the safety and wellbeing of children, we respectfully ask that City Council at a minimum support the **\$6,297,250** in funding requested by ICARE.

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



Testimony of: The Kingsbridge Heights Community Center
3101 Kingsbridge Terrace, Bronx, NY 10463

Submitted by: Karla Rodriguez-Pimentel : KHCCConnect Program Coordinator

Hearing Date: 3/6/25

Dear Honorable Council Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my testimony on behalf of the Kingsbridge Heights Community Center (KHCC). As a multi-service agency deeply rooted in the Bronx, KHCC is uniquely equipped to support immigrant families through a wide array of services including Early Head Start classes, a weekly food pantry, housing services, long-term therapy, and afterschool programs. Our commitment is further exemplified by providing free English classes to over 300 adult immigrants annually, catering to diverse nationalities like the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Ecuador, Venezuela, Peru, and Egypt. We strive to accommodate the schedules of our community beyond traditional business hours, with services offered on weekday evenings and Saturdays.

KHCC's impact extends beyond the classroom through KHCCConnect, our comprehensive case management program. We primarily assist Spanish-speaking immigrants and asylum seekers, addressing their immediate needs such as clothing, food, and toiletries, and providing support through micro-grants, food pantry access, childcare, housing assistance, immigration workshops, and mental health services. In 2024 alone, KHCCConnect has supported 671 individuals across 2391 case management sessions. However, without additional funding, KHCC cannot meet the growing needs of the immigrant community. The need for these services has increased significantly in the past year; oftentimes leading to long waitlists and follow-up times. Despite the growing demand for ESOL classes, KHCC had to eliminate four classes due to reduced funding. Our spring semester is currently at capacity and we have a waitlist of over 100 community members for our fall semester. Other pressing needs amongst the immigrant community include housing and food insecurity. KHCC receives calls or emails every day from community members needing housing services. Despite the community members making every effort to go through and navigate systems independently to obtain rental assistance, they need more support. We've seen many clients being discriminated against by landlords, more so recently as landlords are using immigration status against tenants. The lack of food is another major issue especially when families don't qualify for public assistance programs or have children who do but are fearful about accessing services. KHCC needs your support to expand our services and capacity to respond to our community's current needs.



I would like to conclude by sharing a testament: Maria, a 31-year-old Venezuelan mother of four who recently walked into our center seeking services. She sought out KHCC as the shelter she currently lives in could not support all of her needs. Right away Maria benefited from support from our food pantry and diaper assistance for her two children under four. She will soon be receiving afterschool services at the center for her 12 and 14-year-old children in which they will participate in enriching activities and receive nutritious meals. Maria has expressed trauma over her journey to the United States in which she suffered medical negligence. A referral to our therapy program was made which provides free long-term therapy. Maria looks forward to the services and community at KHCC; this shows our impact on our participants.

We respectfully request funding to continue empowering and assisting high-need immigrant families in the Bronx. Funding could help us increase our capacity for intensive case management, English classes, housing, and mental health services.

Thank you for your consideration and support.

New York City Council Committee on Immigration
Honorable Alexa Avilés, Chair

FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 6, 2025

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

Good afternoon, Chair Avilés and members of the committee. My name is Danae Silkiss, Senior Program Coordinator, and I am representing Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York (KCS), the oldest and largest nonprofit organization supporting Korean-American and other immigrant communities in New York City. Since 1973, KCS has worked to advance economic empowerment, social well-being, and health equity for immigrants through comprehensive services, including education programs that help New Yorkers build the skills they need to succeed.

As you know, over 2.2 million adults in New York City have limited English proficiency or lack a high school diploma. Yet, city and state funding for adult literacy is so inadequate that fewer than 3% of these individuals can access ESOL, adult basic education (ABE), or GED classes each year. This crisis was worsened in FY25 when the administration cut funding for community-based adult literacy programs from \$17 million to \$12 million—a reduction that has been maintained in the FY26 Preliminary Budget.

Given the increasing demand for adult education and the risk of further federal cuts, **NYCCAL calls on the administration to double its baseline funding for adult literacy programs funded through DYCD from \$12 million to \$24 million, restoring last year's cuts and stabilizing these critical services at a time of growing need.**

At KCS, we see firsthand how literacy education transforms lives. Our free ESOL and citizenship preparation classes, supported by DYCD and the New York State Office for New Americans, equip immigrants with the language and civic skills they need to access better jobs, engage in their communities, and secure their futures. These programs are essential, not optional.

New York must uphold its commitment to immigrant communities by making sustainable investments in adult literacy. Thank you for your time and leadership on this issue.

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뉴욕한인봉사센터

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**New York City Council Committee on Immigration
Honorable Alexa Avilés, Chair**

**FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 6, 2025**

Testimony of Kevin Oh, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York Inc.

Good afternoon Chair Avilés and members of the committee. My name is Kevin Oh, and I am a Senior Program Coordinator at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS). KCS is a longstanding nonprofit organization, of about 52 years, dedicated to empowering the Asian American and immigrant communities of New York City through comprehensive social services, including adult literacy education. We are also a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), advocating for equitable access to education for all New Yorkers.

As you are aware, more than 2.2 million adults in New York City have limited English proficiency or lack a high school diploma. Yet, the funding for adult literacy programs remains inadequate, reaching less than 3% of those in need. This crisis disproportionately affects low-income immigrants, particularly in communities like Flushing and Bayside, Queens, where over 70% of Korean and Chinese speakers are Limited English Proficient (LEP). For these individuals, the

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inability to access English language education limits their ability to secure better employment, participate civically, and support their families.

According to the Asian American Federation, the Asian population in New York State increased from 1,579,494 in 2010 to 2,173,719 in 2020—a significant 37.6% growth. Asian Americans now make up 10.8% of the state’s total population, and many of them are immigrants, with two out of three Asians in the state being foreign-born. Nearly 40% of Asian New Yorkers display Limited English Proficiency, a rate significantly higher than the statewide average of 13%. Language barriers impact the quality of life for Asian New Yorkers, limiting their economic and social opportunities.

In New York City, Chinese and Korean populations experience the highest rates of linguistic isolation (42.5%) compared to any other racial or ethnic group, with 62.5% of Koreans and 67.3% of Chinese residents classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP). These language barriers create significant obstacles to securing stable employment, leading to higher rates of poverty. In Queens alone, among the 374,330 foreign-born Asians, over 212,000 report speaking English “less than well.” Even among U.S.-born Asians in the borough, 13.1% struggle with English proficiency. This widespread linguistic isolation affects more than 225,000 individuals, putting them at risk of economic hardship and social exclusion.

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KCS primarily serves the immigrant population in Flushing and Bayside, Queens—communities that serve as vital gateways for new immigrants seeking stability and opportunity. However, the challenges faced by LEP adults in these neighborhoods are severe. Many are limited to low-wage jobs or struggle to find stable employment, with one in three LEP adults in New York City living below the federal poverty line and nearly two in three earning less than 200% of that threshold. Despite the growing demand for ESOL classes, the Adams administration reduced multi-year DYCD-funded adult literacy program contracts from \$17 million to \$12 million in FY25, with the same cut proposed for FY26. This devastating reduction means thousands of students who rely on these programs to build better futures will be left without access to essential services. According to the Preliminary Mayor's Management Report, 18,000 adults were served in DYCD-funded literacy programs in FY24, yet under the reduced funding, only about 9,118 will be served—cutting support for half of those in need. While the City Council has provided discretionary allocations to temporarily restore some funding, these are stopgap measures rather than long-term solutions.

Without adequate investment in ESOL programs, LEP immigrants in Flushing, Bayside, and New York City remain trapped in cycles of poverty and isolation. Expanding access to English

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education is not just a matter of workforce development—it is a critical step toward ensuring economic mobility, civic participation, and a stronger, more inclusive New York City.

NYCCAL calls on the administration to **double its baseline funding for adult literacy programs funded through DYCD from \$12 million to \$24 million**, restoring the cuts from last year and enabling programs to bolster and stabilize their services in a time of increased need and continuous threats to our communities. In addition, on behalf of all the students the Council’s Adult Literacy Pilot and Adult Literacy Initiative funding is currently serving, NYCCAL wishes to express our deepest gratitude, and **we ask the Council to maintain this funding at its current level of \$16.5 million in FY26.**

Adult literacy education is not just about learning English—it is about ensuring economic mobility, fostering civic engagement, and breaking barriers to opportunity for New York City’s immigrant communities. We must demonstrate our city’s unwavering commitment to these principles by fully funding the programs that serve our most vulnerable residents. Thank you for your time and dedication to this critical issue.

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**New York City Council Committee on Immigration
Honorable Alexa Avilés, Chair**

**FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 6, 2025**

Testimony of Teresa Baik, Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc.

Good afternoon Chair Avilés and members of the committee. My name is Teresa Baik and I am the Director of Education at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York, Inc. (KCS). KCS is a 52-year old social service nonprofit organization whose mission is to be a bridge for Korean immigrants and the wider Asian community to fully integrate into society and overcome any economic, health and linguistic barriers so that they become independent and thriving members of the community. We accomplish this mission by providing culturally competent programs in the areas of Aging, Education, Immigration, Workforce Development, Public Health and Mental Health. In addition, KCS is a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), a coalition comprised of adult literacy teachers, program managers, students, and allies from over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across the five boroughs.

For over 20 years, KCS has provided adult literacy classes through city funding. Each year, the number of students and the number of classes have increased and is evidence of the success for our ESOL program and the constant need for adult literacy programming in our

HEADQUARTERS (ADULT DAYCARE)	OLDER ADULT CENTER	PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH CENTER (1)	PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH CENTER (2)	WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT	MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC
EDUCATION HR IMMIGRATION PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH CENTER WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT)	42-15 166th St, Flushing, NY 11358 Tel: 718-886-8203	315 5th Ave, #705, New York, NY 10016 Tel: 212-463-9685	410 Broad Ave, #201, Palisades Park, NJ 07650 Tel: 201-429-2866	325 West 38th St, #1107, New York, NY 10018 Tel: 929-300-8630, 929-341-8302	42-16 162nd St, 2FL, Flushing, NY 11358 Tel: 718-366-9540
203-05 32nd Ave, Bayside, NY 11361 Tel: 718-939-6137	37-06 111th St, Corona, NY 11368 Tel: 718-651-9220	2460 Lemoine Ave, #400P, Fort Lee, NJ 07024 Tel: 201-364-8375	3556 159th St, #2nd Floor, Flushing, NY 11358 Tel: 718-939-6137		
	633 W 115th St, New York, NY 10025 Tel: 718-886-8203, 347-923-0124	103-04 39th Ave, #103, Corona, NY 11368 Tel: 917-396-4149			



communities. We operate our in-person and virtual classes from Monday - Saturday with flexible class times in the morning, afternoon, and evening to best accommodate our students and their busy schedules.

In FY '25 the Adams administration cut funding for community based adult literacy programs funded through multiyear contracts with DYCD from \$17 million to \$12 million. This reduction in funding has been maintained in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget for FY26. Our students need these classes and with the Trump administration there is a great risk that these programs will either be cut, eliminated, and/or restricted.

We are calling on the administration to **double its baseline funding for adult literacy programs funded through DYCD from \$12 million to \$24 million**, restoring the cuts from last year and enabling programs to bolster and stabilize their services in a time of increased need and continuous threats to our communities. In addition, on behalf of our students, we want to express our deepest gratitude to the support that the Council's Adult Literacy Pilot & Adult Literacy Initiative funding has given to our organization. In addition, we want to ask the Council to **maintain this funding at its current level of \$16.5 million in FY26.**

Thank you for your attention.

HEADQUARTERS (ADULT DAYCARE EDUCATION HR IMMIGRATION PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH CENTER WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT)	OLDER ADULT CENTER	PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH CENTER (1)	PUBLIC HEALTH AND RESEARCH CENTER (2)	WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT	MENTAL HEALTH CLINIC
203-05 32nd Ave, Bayside, NY 11361 Tel: 718-939-6137	42-15 166th St, Flushing, NY 11358 Tel: 718-886-8203	315 5th Ave, #705, New York, NY 10016 Tel: 212-463-9685	410 Broad Ave, #201, Palisades Park, NJ 07650 Tel: 201-429-2866	325 West 38th St, #1107, New York, NY 10018 Tel: 929-300-8630, 929-341-8302	42-16 162nd St, 2FL, Flushing, NY 11358 Tel: 718-366-9540
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	633 W 115th St, New York, NY 10025 Tel: 718-886-8203, 347-923-0124	103-04 39th Ave, #103, Corona, NY 11368 Tel: 917-396-4149			



Elmhurst

New York City Council Committee on Immigration Preliminary Budget Hearing March 6, 2025

Walter Fendrich, LCSW-R, Clinical Director
Libertas Center for Human Rights
Elmhurst Hospital Center
NYC Health + Hospitals Corporation
fendricw@nychhc.org
718-334-6209

FY26 New York City Council Discretionary Funding Application Number: 188009

Funding Request

Amount Requested from Immigrant Health Initiative: \$280,000

- \$100,000 for care coordination and case management to address the medical, mental health, social and legal needs of our clients
- \$180,000 for an attorney to directly meet our clients' dire need for legal services

Testimony

Hi my name is Walter Fendrich, and I'm a Clinical Social Worker and the Clinical Director at the Libertas Center for Human Rights at Elmhurst Hospital, part of New York City Health + Hospitals, based in Jackson Heights, Queens. Thank you very much for inviting me to provide testimony today and for your support of our program.

The Libertas Center for Human Rights is a program providing medical, mental health, social and legal services to immigrants in New York City who have survived torture and human rights violations in their countries of origin on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, political opinion, or membership in a social group, such as age, gender, or LGBTQ identity; 90% of our clients are asylum seekers. Our mission is to provide integrated services to help survivors heal, regain independence, and restore hope and humanity in their lives.

The Libertas Center is applying for discretionary funding from the New York City Council to support case management, care coordination, and crisis responsive services for immigrant survivors of torture and human rights violations to stabilize their physical and psychological health, their social wellbeing, and their legal situations. New York City Council funding will help prevent client crises and support their return to stability as emergencies arise - which they will. Crises include homelessness and unpredictable shelter availability, food insecurity, unstable employment, immigration crises such as deportation orders and ICE raids, and resulting declines in mental health and episodes of suicidality.

Client referrals to the Libertas Center who have come to the U.S. via the Mexico border increased from 44% in 2022 to 66% in 2023 to 81% in 2024. In 2024, 50% of new clients to our program were seeking a lawyer at intake, while only 25% of ongoing clients were seeking a lawyer at intake prior to 2024. This demonstrates the current scarcity of free and low-cost legal representation in our city. With the City Council's support, the Libertas Center will be able to better respond to the needs of recently arrived asylum seekers, and the impact of the new federal administration's executive orders and immigration policies. Thank you very much for your time and consideration of our program.



Literacy Assistance Center

New York City Council Committee on Immigration Honorable Alexa Avilés, Chair

FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing March 6, 2025

Testimony of Ira Yankwitt, Literacy Assistance Center

Good afternoon Chair Avilés and members of the committee. My name is Ira Yankwitt, and I am the Executive Director of the Literacy Assistance Center (LAC), a 42-year-old nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening and expanding the adult education system and to advancing adult literacy as a foundation for equal opportunity and social justice. I am also a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), a coalition comprised of adult literacy teachers, program managers, students, and allies from over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across the five boroughs.

As you know, there are currently over 2.2 million adults in New York City with limited English language proficiency or who do not have a high school diploma. Yet combined city and state funding for adult literacy education is so limited that fewer than 3% of these New Yorkers are able to access ESOL, adult basic education (ABE), or GED classes in any given year.

Moreover, while the need for adult education classes has only grown over the past two years, in FY25 the Adams administration inexplicably cut funding for community based adult literacy programs funded through multiyear contracts with DYCD from \$17 million to \$12 million. This reduction in funding has been maintained in the Mayors Preliminary Budget for FY26.

The overwhelming majority of the 2.2 million New Yorkers in need of adult literacy classes are poor and working-class immigrants, women, and people of color; and there is a great risk that the Trump administration will cut, eliminate, or place restrictions on the federal funding stream (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Title II) that currently provides approximately \$24.6 million a year in ESOL, ABE, and GED funding to NYC. The loss of all of this funding would eliminate seats for well over 20,000 students.

According to January's Preliminary Mayor's Management Report, there were over 18,000 adults served in DYCD-funded adult literacy programs in FY24. Yet the \$12M in funding for FY25 and the proposed \$12M in funding for FY26 is slated to serve only 9,118 students, just half the number of those served in FY24. Fortunately, this year, the Council restored the administration's cuts to services through its discretionary funding. But discretionary funding is never guaranteed, and it shouldn't be incumbent upon the Council to subsidize the administration and cover for its failure to invest in core community needs.

NYCCAL calls on the administration to **double its baseline funding for adult literacy programs funded through DYCD from \$12 million to \$24 million**, restoring the cuts from last year and enabling programs to bolster and stabilize their services in a time of increased need and continuous threats to our communities. In addition, on behalf of all the students the Council's Adult Literacy Pilot and Adult Literacy Initiative funding is currently serving, NYCCAL wishes to express our deepest gratitude, and **we ask the Council to maintain this funding at its current level of \$16.5 million in FY26.**

Adult literacy education provides immigrants with greater opportunities, furthers gender equity, and advances educational and racial justice. Let's demonstrate our city's steadfast commitment to these principles and refuse to leave any of our communities behind.

Thank you for your attention.



Lutheran Social Services of New York

Testimonial Letter to the New York City Council Committee on Immigration Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026, the Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2026-2029

Hon. Alexa Aviles, Chair

March 6, 2025

Thank you to Chair Alexa Aviles and the City Council for your support of immigrants in New York City. I am writing to support the funding of immigration legal services for immigrant New Yorkers, and in particular, to urge the city to continue funding for the Asylum Seeker Legal Assistance Network (“ASLAN”) and the citywide Immigration Legal Support Centers (formerly ActionNYC). My name is Cecilia Aranzamendez, and I am the Executive Director for Community Services at Lutheran Social Services of New York (“LSSNY”).

Founded in 1886, LSSNY is a social services agency committed to its mission of transforming communities by collaborating with individuals, families and leaders to dismantle the causes and effects of persistent poverty and social injustice. We serve more than 7,000 people per day, with programs that serve thousands of adolescents and their families annually through our Children’s Services, Residential, Early Childhood Education, and Community Services programs. Our success in serving individuals and families is made possible by the work of dedicated staff, volunteers, and a network of supportive congregations and communities. LSSNY has extensive experience serving immigrants and children through our Immigration Legal Program (“ILP”), housed within Community Services.

ILP offers free or low-cost direct immigration legal services to under-served immigrants in the New York City metropolitan area. LSSNY’s attorneys and navigators are experts in working with asylum seekers and recently arrived immigrants, and our team has been working with the influx of migrants to NYC since they first arrived in the summer of 2022. Indeed, LSSNY was on the ground at the Port Authority bus terminal welcoming and guiding migrants as they were bussed to New York. Later, when New York City set up operations at the Red Cross Building in midtown Manhattan, LSSNY rapidly deployed staff to conduct Know Your Rights workshops and screenings for these newly arrived migrants. Finally, LSSNY joined the Asylum Seeker Legal Assistance Network (“ASLAN”), through which we provide application assistance for asylum, work permits, Temporary Protected Status, Immigration Court motions, and appeals to the Board of Immigration Appeals.

In addition to working with newly arrived migrants, LSSNY staffs Immigration Legal Support Centers (formerly ActionNYC) with qualified immigration attorneys. At the Immigration Legal Support Centers, LSSNY attorneys provide consultations with New York City’s immigrants regardless of when they came to the United States. In FY24, LSSNY attorneys conducted 1,170 immigration legal consultations to immigrant New Yorkers — often assisting community members who could not otherwise access quality legal assistance. Following a consultation, LSSNY attorneys supervise and collaborate with Community Navigators at partner non-profits to provide immigration application assistance and/or referrals to the New Yorkers who are eligible for immigration relief. In addition to providing valuable and trustworthy legal advice, these

centers assist migrants in applying for a variety of immigration benefits or relief, such as work permits, permanent resident status (Green Cards), citizenship, Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA).

The immigration legal process is incredibly complex and often overwhelming. Faced with constantly changing immigration policies and priorities, esoteric immigration rules, in addition to language barriers, immigrant New Yorkers must contend with the constant threat of deportation, family separation, and instability. Without proper legal representation, they are unable to navigate these challenges and could face grave consequences. Studies by TRAC through the years have shown that the percentage of asylum applicants who prevail in their applications increases significantly when they are represented by an attorney; in New York, as of January 2025, while only 37.27% of unrepresented asylum applicants obtain grants in immigration court, that number jumps to 73% when the applicants are represented.¹

Immigration legal services provide a crucial safety net that ensures that these individuals are not left to face an unjust system alone. The current zeitgeist enabling the vilification of immigrants has led to federal initiatives rescinding immigration relief and implementing harsh enforcement measures, creating a climate of fear and uncertainty among immigrant communities everywhere. Immigrants are afraid for themselves, their families, and their friends, and are choosing to stop sending their children to school or to seek police assistance because they fear being reported to immigration authorities.

Furthermore, nonprofit agencies throughout the country (LSSNY included) are dealing with the ramifications of federal funding freezes that strain our already stretched resources. Without any indication of whether federal contracts will be honored and paid out, many agencies are being forced to lay off their staff. In this environment, funding from NYC for immigration legal services is more crucial than ever, with the demand for reliable, free practitioners far outstripping the capacity of the nonprofit community in NYC. Now, more than ever, we must stand together to ensure that our immigrant neighbors have access to the legal support they need to protect their rights.

In the face of these challenges, New York City has stood as a beacon of support for immigrant communities. New York City is a sanctuary for immigrants, and we must continue to honor that commitment by ensuring that legal services are available to everyone, regardless of their immigration status. Immigrants are an integral part of our economy, workforce, and cultural identity. They are teachers, health workers, business owners, and caregivers who contribute to the prosperity of our city. Denying them access to legal resources undermines the values that make New York City the inclusive, diverse, and vibrant place that it is.

The funding for immigration legal services in our city has allowed countless individuals to seek legal counsel, apply for asylum, access work authorization, defend their removal proceedings, and navigate the hostile immigration system. Through FY 2024 and 2025, our ASLAN team of attorneys and navigators have screened and assisted approximately 2,700 individuals in their applications for immigration relief. We have filed over 500 asylum applications and 590 applications for work authorization.

¹ See <https://tracreports.org/phptools/immigration/asylum/>.

Many individuals we serve through this funding are members of marginalized communities in their home countries seeking lives that are free of persecution. A few examples are listed below.

- We were able to assist a Fulani woman from West Africa who was persecuted by the government after protesting for the rights of Fulani people. Once in the United States, she intended to pursue her asylum case but was ordered removed after missing a court date because she had to attend to her partner's sick children. Our team successfully filed a motion to reopen her case, after which we assisted her with filing a pro se asylum application, and later provided her full legal representation in her court proceedings. Because of this funding, our client is now able to work lawfully and support herself.
- We also helped another client and her children with their applications for asylum from Peru, where they had received death threats because one of the daughters is gay. We assisted them with filing their pro se asylum application and met with them several times to understand their story, develop their case, and prepare them for court. They ultimately represented themselves in immigration court and were granted at their individual court hearing. The mother can now work lawfully, and the family are now permitted to remain in the United States permanently and are on their way to becoming citizens.
- We assisted a transgender woman who fled her home country after being persecuted by community members because she advocated for LGBTQ+ rights. We assisted her in filing a pro se asylum application and employment authorization. She has since been able to move out of her shelter and she continues to advocate for transgender rights in New York City.

These are just some of the ways that illustrate the effects of our work in ASLAN. Aside from the tangible benefits that our clients receive, such as the ability to remain in the US and to work lawfully, our clients are given hope and affirmation that they, too, matter. I urge the members of the New York City Council to continue their strong commitment to immigrant communities by continuing funding for immigration legal services, and specifically, for the ASLAN project and the Immigration Legal Support Centers. This investment is an investment in New York City's diverse communities, and demonstrates the city's commitment to justice, fairness, and the continued success of all of New York City's residents. The city's immigrant residents deserve the opportunity to live and work with dignity, and access to legal representation is a fundamental part of that.

Respectfully,



Cecilia Aranzamendez
Executive Director for Community Services
Lutheran Social Services of New York



Make the Road New York
Testimony to Immigration Committee
Written version

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

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

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

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

1) The City Council must expand and safeguard funding for the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative (RRLC). The RRLC is a unique program within the city's legal services ecosystem: it provides high-quality legal representation to individuals on the precipice of deportation. Last year, the mayor proposed cutting the RRLC's budget by about half, despite the uptick in demands for RRLC's services at the time. While temporary funding from this Council helped avert a crisis, the program's future remains precarious. This instability could not come at a worse time, when immigrant communities across the boroughs are facing a concerted attack on their rights from a new Trump administration—from trying to end or constrain paths to legal

status to reviving deportation processes that violate basic notions of due process. Against that backdrop, demand for RRLC's services continues to soar daily. With enforcement and deportation cases surging, the City Council must make a bold statement—create a dedicated \$25 million rapid-response fund that would safeguard and expand the RRLC's funding and address the cascade of crises families face during immigration enforcement actions, from housing instability to food insecurity. The Council should also meet this moment by fortifying and scaling up the City's immigration legal services infrastructure by investing \$59 million in funding for immigration legal services to broaden access to legal representation and increase and baseline \$40 million for the Immigrant Opportunity Initiative.

Demand for legal services for immigrant workers is at all time highs while anti-immigrant rhetoric and federal policy threatens community well-being and funding levels remain stagnant or are at risk. The City must prioritize resources for the Low Wage Worker Support initiative to ensure that immigrant workers have access to quality legal representation, and commit at least \$362,750 to Make the Road New York to sustain our program. Our attorneys and advocates do the critical work of educating workers about their workplace rights and representing them in the face of exploitation and abuse.

The City must allocate an additional \$5 million to the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP) to ensure their ability to enforce key worker and consumer protections such as Paid Sick Leave and the new minimum pay rule for delivery workers, which affect the immigrant workers we serve. Without meaningful and adequately resourced enforcement, these protections are not real for immigrant workers in New York City.

Similarly, the City must restore the budget for the City Commission on Human Rights to \$21 million. For the past several years, the grossly underfunded Commission has been unable to enforce anti-discrimination laws due to their lack of adequate staff. At a time when we see rampant discrimination and federal agencies can not be counted on we need the City to have robust enforcement.

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

of services to New Yorkers, we support the recommendation of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL) to double its baseline funding for adult literacy programs funded through DYCD from \$12 million to \$24 million, restoring the cuts from last year and enabling programs to bolster and stabilize their services in a time of increased need and continuous threats to our communities.

3) Failure to fund critical health initiatives would harm our communities' health in a moment when immigrant New Yorkers are most vulnerable. MRNY relies on initiatives like Access Health and others to provide essential health access services to immigrant communities in NYC. Our full range of health access programs include SNAP and health insurance benefits outreach and community education, enrollment, navigation and connection to wrap-around services. We offer programs that help to manage chronic conditions, such as asthma and diabetes, through our Community Health Worker services, and TGNCIQ health access services, which thousands rely on to meet their basic health needs. Furthermore, cuts to Health + Hospitals could impact the health services our immigrant community members receive, for example, through NYC Care, because many are not eligible for health insurance and therefore rely heavily on Health + Hospitals to meet all their healthcare needs.

4) All children and families in our communities deserve safe, supportive, well-resourced public schools. School districts are responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of ALL their students. Schools can and should be stabilizing forces in the lives of immigrant students, offering safety, belonging and hope in the face of uncertainty. As the federal government moves toward dismantling the US Department of Education with the devastating potential of slashed funding and protections for the most vulnerable students, we need the city to fully fund our public schools. We are facing cuts to restorative justice, community schools, mental health support and Student Success Centers - programs that Make the Road NY members fought for and are now implementing on the ground. With 1 in 9 students experiencing homelessness, rising mental health needs, and the growing attacks on Black, immigrant and trans students and schools, this is not the time to let these vital services be cut. Immigrant youth should be able to focus on school - not on whether they will be deported. Trans youth should be able to focus on school - not on whether their civil rights will be stripped away. We are calling on you today to restore and baseline funding for the programs and supportive staff these young people need and deserve - \$12M for restorative justice, \$14M for community schools, \$3.3M for Student Success Centers and \$5M for the Mental Health Continuum.

Also as a reminder of what our youth members have been saying for years - police in school don't make them feel safe. We spend more than \$400M to police students in schools, yet interactions with police can put youth on track to deportation or prison. We need to redirect

resources to restorative justice, mental health, and other staff and practices that help students learn and thrive. This includes putting in place an immediate freeze on hiring of any new school police - the safest schools have the most resources, not the most police. We must invest in student care, not criminalization.

The loss of thousands of seats for free, universal 3-K, an essential early childhood education program, will hurt working-class and immigrant New Yorkers and their families, who they cannot feed without adequate childcare. Cuts to CUNY and the support for students from our communities to get the extra support they need to succeed in college will also be devastating. At a time when colleges are struggling with enrollment and re-engaging students, this is the last thing that should be cut.

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

- Securing \$300,000 for Make the Road under the Speaker's Initiative for wraparound legal, health, and educational services, plus \$50,000 under the Speaker's Initiative for our Trans Immigrant Project for vital outreach to this extremely vulnerable community.
- Increasing Make the Road funding under the Low Wage Worker Support initiative to \$362,750 for our unique model of comprehensive legal support and mobilization of immigrant workers for better working conditions.
- Renew Legal Services for the Working Poor funding and allocate \$165,900 to Make the Road to provide free, culturally competent legal services in employment, public benefits, housing, and more.
- Expand overall funding for the Access Health Initiative to \$4M (\$110,000 to Make the Road), allocate \$2.36M in funding for the MCCAP Initiative (\$76,218 to Make the Road), and maintain FY25 levels of funding for the Ending the Epidemic and Immigrant Health initiatives.
- Double the administration's baseline funding for adult literacy programs funded through DYCD from \$12 million to \$24 million, restoring the cuts from last year and enabling programs to bolster and stabilize their services in a time of increased need and continuous threats to our communities. (Make the Road is prioritizing a request for a renewal of \$449,000 from the adult literacy pilot.)

Thank you for standing up for these vital services that immigrants and working-class New Yorkers depend on.

Testimony of Mixteca Organization Inc. to the Immigration Committee of the New York City Council

Preliminary Hearing on the FY26 Budget

Date: March 6, 2025

Honorable Members of the Committee,

Good Afternoon, my name is Jorge Paz Reyes, and I'm the Community Organizer at Mixteca, a community-based organization committed to serving immigrant communities throughout New York City. We work in close partnership with the city to provide essential services to those who need it most—immigrants who contribute to the vibrancy and diversity of our great city.

I come before you today to speak on behalf of the immigrant community we serve, to express our deep concern regarding the proposed budget cuts for the FY26 fiscal year, particularly to immigration services. The cuts proposed by the mayor—including \$4.4 million to legal services for low-income immigrants, \$2.4 million for the Immigrant Health Initiative, and \$2.6 million for Immigrant Opportunities Initiatives—are devastating. These cuts are not just numbers; they represent the loss of critical services that help immigrants build a better life, often after fleeing unimaginable hardships in their home countries.

At Mixteca, we witness firsthand the importance of these services, we particularly focus on uplifting the immigrant community by providing services in different areas such as; Education, Mental Health, Health and Wellness, Advocacy and Legal Services. Every month, we serve over 1,000 community members from all over the city, offering services ranging from assistance with Fair Fares reduced MetroCards to applying for asylum, individual counseling, and support for families navigating the complexities of life in a new country.

Although the Mayor has signaled that New York City's immigrant community no longer needs the services it once did, this is not true. Since November 5, 2024, we have seen an increase in the need for our legal services; we have received more than 40 requests for KYR workshops in the last two months alone, and have provided KYR workshops to more than 500 community members this year alone; we continue to assist asylum seekers, and have assisted 379 applicants since January 2024. The immigrants we serve come to us with the goal of becoming part of the fabric of New York City, contributing to our economy and enriching our communities.

Another critical part of the services we provide at Mixteca is our **mental health services**, which are highlighted by the City as part of the Immigrant Health Initiative. Immigrants face a variety of unique challenges—trauma from their experiences in their home countries, navigating a new life in a city that is often unfamiliar, and the stress of facing potential legal and social barriers.

For these reasons, Mixteca has dedicated significant resources to offering a wide range of culturally sensitive mental health services. We provide individual counseling, group discussions, workshops, and healing spaces that focus on key issues such as parenting skills, violence awareness and prevention, trauma healing, and emotional management.

These services are tailored to resonate with the Latinx immigrant community, blending contemporary mental health approaches with traditional healing practices to create meaningful and effective support. We conduct all of our services in Spanish, with translation to Indigenous languages available when needed. Every aspect of our programming is designed to be culturally relevant and trauma-informed.

The impact of our mental health and legal services cannot be overstated. We have seen firsthand how these programs help individuals and families heal, find hope, and build stronger, healthier connections within their community. These qualities are crucial in dismantling the intergenerational trauma that immigrant communities often face and barrier they face when becoming a New Yorker

None of this would be possible without the support and funding the city has provided for immigrant services.

These services, along with those of many other community-based organizations, are crucial to the well-being of the immigrant community. Without them, we risk undoing the progress we've made in supporting some of New York City's most vulnerable populations. We are calling on this committee, and on all members of the City Council, to advocate for the restoration and protection of funding for immigrant services.

We understand that budget decisions are difficult, but these cuts would have real consequences for thousands of immigrants who rely on these services to build a better future for themselves and their families.

Thank you for your time and for your ongoing support of immigrant communities across our city.

Sincerely,
Jorge Paz Reyes
Community Organizer
Mixteca Organization Inc.



NEIGHBORHOOD DEFENDER SERVICE OF HARLEM

New York City Council Committee on Immigration Written Testimony of Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem Hearing Date: March 6, 2026

The Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem (“NDS”) submits this written testimony in support of increased funding for immigration defense.

NDS Harlem is a community-based public defender office serving the Harlem community. Harlem is a center of Black and Latin culture as well as home to a diverse and vibrant immigrant community. Our office has been embedded in the community for 30 years, and holistic representation ensures that our mission is deeply connected to community needs. Each year we serve approximately 5,000 individuals in Northern Manhattan, encompassing East, Central, and West Harlem, Washington Heights, and Inwood and nearly 300 clients in The Bronx. NDS operates as the sole neighborhood-based office providing comprehensive services under one roof, tackling complex issues through its holistic approach, blending integrated legal services and impactful wraparound programs.

NDS’s Immigration Team works to protect immigrant New Yorkers from the ever-increasing threat of ICE enforcement. Over the last several years, the U.S. immigration system has grown ever more punitive, with more and more families separated and New Yorkers torn away from the only home they have ever known. Many non-citizens, particularly those with a prior arrest or conviction, will face the severe and unjust consequences of ICE’s presence in New York City. To be sure, many of the expanded federal attacks on immigrants have focused on non-citizens who have been arrested or charged with criminal activity, even while working to criminalize the immigrant community as a whole. During the last Trump administration, ICE had often been present in criminal court on the days of our clients’ appearances, preying upon and interfering with our courts, arresting and detaining clients even before the resolution of their criminal cases. Even as COVID-19 rapidly spread through our city, ICE targeted our clients and arrested them at their homes, often based on low-level criminal charges.

Only two months into this second Trump administration, the administration’s policies and threats of mass deportation without due process, while eliminating protections from sensitive locations such as schools and churches, have traumatized the Harlem community. New directives and rules are enhancing consequences of even minor convictions that were previously deemed immigration-“safe,” exposing more of our clients to the threat of removal and posing barriers to obtaining lawful status and naturalization. For example, under the Laken Riley Act, a non-citizen can be detained indefinitely for a mere accusation of a petty theft. Meanwhile, the Department of Justice is ramping



NEIGHBORHOOD DEFENDER SERVICE OF HARLEM

up the pressure on judges, officers, and prosecutors to achieve maximal deportation, while gutting the few remaining procedural protections sustaining the thin veneer

of due process in the immigration courts, making it ever more difficult for non-citizens to defend themselves in removal proceedings.

Along with our clients, NDS is on the front lines of these hostile attacks. Every day, our immigration practice provides advice and representation to clients with an arrest or conviction to help them understand the risk of ICE enforcement, as well as helping New Yorkers navigate the ever-changing field of affirmative relief and defending them against removal charges to keep New York's immigrant families and communities together.

We appreciate the Council's commitment to support our immigrant communities. The need for our services has grown exponentially, and our teams are managing high caseloads to support as much of the Harlem community as possible. We need more resources to continue to respond to this crisis. We encourage the Council to offer more resources to immigration teams, such as NDS's, to continue to provide comprehensive immigration support, vital Know Your Rights trainings, and defense against unjust and violent separation of New York families.

NORTHERN MANHATTAN IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION (NMIC)

Written Testimony

Regarding:

FY26 Preliminary Budget Hearing

SUBMITTED TO:

THE NEW YORK CITY COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION

March 6, 2025

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

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

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

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

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

Both CSBG and the OVW are facing existential threats at the federal level. Unelected, unappointed political allies are loudly and publicly moving to destroy these programs, in order to harm our communities and cripple the nonprofit agencies serving them. They, through the presidential administration, are working as one to uproot our entire structure to vital services for immigrants, survivors, the poor and the vulnerable across all demographics. OVW was explicitly targeted when the administration attempted a unilateral halt to all programs for survivors and other vulnerable persons throughout the nation. Please note these are but two examples; federal cuts will certainly limit or destroy other aspects of NMIC's legal and social service work.

NMIC and other organizations are, two months into this presidency, already forced to plan for the pending devastation of our programs. Jobs will be lost, including attorneys, educators, social workers and other vital, dedicated staff who are passionate about serving our community. We are contemplating the elimination of entire swaths of our organization, and some nonprofits will likely be gone completely.

While for the time being we are forced to accept the reality of the current federal government and its malicious disdain for our work and our neighbors, the City and State must help stem the bleeding. Nonprofits are already working beyond capacity, but we are now on the precipice. Community members in need of legal services, in need of help escaping threats of violence or death, will have nowhere to turn to.

On behalf of NMIC and immigrant communities across New York, we strongly urge the City to do whatever possible to expand funding for immigrant services. The City needs a sustainable infrastructure for legal and other services for immigrants, regardless of background, and this has never been more important.

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



**Testimony of Christine Clarke Before
NYC Council, Committee on Immigration
Regarding Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 6, 2025**

My name is Christine Clarke, I am the Chief of Litigation and Advocacy at Legal Services NYC. We thank the Committee for offering us this chance to testify about the desperate need for civil immigration legal services funding, particularly at this time of extreme anxiety amid a federal assault on immigrants.

Legal Services NYC is the largest provider of civil legal services in the country, providing free civil legal services for over 100,000 low-income people in New York City each and every year. Indeed, we handle well over 5,000 immigration legal services cases every year for clients all over the City, including representation in affirmative and defensive asylum cases from application to hearing, obtaining immigration relief for victims of domestic violence and other crimes, and helping our clients obtain work authorization, permanent resident status, and ultimately U.S. citizenship.

I know the Committee is well aware of the threats facing immigrant New Yorkers right now, particularly for those who are trans or gender nonconforming. Moreover, I know the Committee is well aware that, in order to remain the vibrant and diverse city of immigrants that New York has always been, we must find a way to protect our city's residents from these cruel, xenophobic, and unlawful policies. While New York City has a thriving and committed nonprofit civil legal services community, we cannot fight for these vulnerable communities alone. Thus, as this Committee's Report notes, advocates across the City are ringing the alarm that we need to substantially increase City funding for full representation immigration legal services.

The preliminary budget does not come anywhere near to meeting this need. Specifically, the preliminary budget includes no increased funding for the Immigrant Opportunity Initiative (IOI), under which a number of providers, including Legal Services NYC, offer a broad swath of comprehensive immigration legal services. Increased funding for this program is desperately needed. In December of 2024, Legal Services NYC and other IOI contract recipients collectively wrote a letter to Mayor Adams laying out the extreme underfunding in the IOI contract and the need for a substantial increase in funding just to cover the cost of the services being provided. Indeed, the program as it is currently constituted requires immigration legal services providers to **subsidize** the required work by over **\$12.5 million** per year. For every dollar that Legal Services NYC receives under this contract, we must spend two extra dollars to provide the required services.

Demand Justice.

This extreme shortfall is due, in large part, to the fact that the contracts have not been modified in over eight years, and the scale and complexity of need for immigration legal services has grown astronomically since then, as has the cost of living for our staff. Moreover, as nonprofits face threats of severe funding cuts and shortfalls from the federal government, the prospect of subsidizing City contracts becomes increasingly less tenable. Regardless of the reason, the City must commit to right sizing these contracts and ensuring that providers are able to continue providing these vital services to our communities.

We at Legal Services NYC are committed to fighting for low income New Yorkers, no matter where they come from, and we will stand up for our clients, our neighbors, and our communities. But we cannot fight this tide of xenophobia, transphobia, and racism alone, we need the full partnership of the City government. Fully funding the IOI contracts by providing **\$12.5 million** in additional funds for the current contract recipients is a crucial and necessary step towards that end. Together, with sufficient and appropriate funding, in partnership with the City and with our coalition partners, we have a fighting chance at preserving the soul of this City.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

Respectfully Submitted,



Christine Clarke
Chief of Litigation and Advocacy
Legal Services NYC
cclarke@lsnyc.org



**Testimony by New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)
Before the NYC Council Committee on Immigration regarding:
Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026, the Preliminary Capital Plan for Years
2026-2029, and the Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report**

March 6, 2025

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

We appreciate the opportunity to testify to the Immigration Committee regarding the budget for Fiscal Year 2026. NYLAG is proud to operate in a City that values its immigrant citizens and supports much-needed services to them through its annual budget. We are thankful that the Council has long funded initiatives like the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative and Immigrant Health Initiative, and created new funding streams that respond to changing needs, such as Legal Services for Low-Income Immigrants and Protect NYC Families.

Long-term, continued and increased investment in legal services – including the deep expertise housed within our organizations -- is crucial to meeting the current and future needs of immigrant families in New York. Our city of immigrants is under attack by the federal government, whose policies are undermining our security, subjecting our residents to cruel and inhumane enforcement and detention, and threatening our economy by dividing our communities.

Rapid Response Legal Collaborative Expand and Safeguard Funding

The Rapid Response Legal Collaborative (RRLC) was founded in 2019 in a joint funding effort from the City and State of New York to fill the gaps in legal representation and expertise for immigrants who are detained or at imminent risk of detention and deportation. RRLC remains a unique program within the city's legal services ecosystem in that it provides high-quality legal representation to "post order" cases—immigrants who have a removal or deportation order either because they have been denied asylum or other form of relief or because they have missed a hearing. The vast majority of removal orders are issued without a fair opportunity for the immigrant to fully put forth a claim either because of ineffective assistance of counsel or due process violations which are rife in an overburdened and fast-tracked Immigration Court system. The failure of the Immigration Court system to provide adequate notice of hearing dates and times, which has been compounded by the City's 30/60 shelter stay rules has resulted in an enormous uptick in removal orders in New York just in the last three years—24,000 removal orders were issued out of the New York City Immigration Courts in FY23 alone, a 64% increase from previous years. The Rapid Response Legal Collaborative which has flexible programming that can rapidly pivot to meet emerging

needs had filed hundreds of Motions to Reopen, Stays, and Appeals to challenge these removal orders with an 88% success rate.

Last year, the Mayor proposed cutting the RRLC's budget in half despite the increase in the need and demand for RRLC services. While temporary funding from this Council helped avert a crisis, the program's future remains precarious. This instability could not come at a worse time, when immigrant communities are facing unprecedented enforcement action which targets individuals and families with removal orders. Against that backdrop, demand for RRLC's services continues to soar not only from immigrants but from community-organizations, religious leaders, and other legal service providers. With enforcement and deportation surging, the City Council must fully restore and expand RRLC's \$1,005,000 budget.

We also call upon City Council to make a bold statement to create a dedicated \$25 million rapid-response fund to provide financial support and emergency services to immigrant families and communities who are directly impacted by ICE enforcement activities, including food and housing support for families who have had a bread-winner detained. The Council should also meet this moment by scaling and fortifying the City's immigration legal services infrastructure by investing \$59 million in funding for immigration legal services—including the \$1 million funding for RRLC—to broaden access to legal representation.

Continued Support and Expansion for the Immigrant Opportunity Initiative (IOI)

NYLAG joins other legal service providers to call for an increase and baseline \$40 million for the Immigrant Opportunity Initiative (IOI). The IOI program which funds many of the immigration legal services and community-based organizations in the City and thus far, we have collectively represented clients in over 37,000 cases under the contract, benefiting

over 55,000 people. We commend that Council that in this time of extreme uncertainty for NYC's immigrant communities, the City has extended the existing contract for one year, so that we are able to ensure continuous support and services for communities in need.

We also urge the City to **increase funding** to the contracted providers. The current IOI contracts were entered into eight (8) years ago. Since then, not only has the scale of the need for immigration legal services grown, but so has the complexity of clients' needs. However, the IOI contract terms have not changed to reflect these changes. As a result, the contracted providers are currently subsidizing the work performed under the contract by **\$12.5 million** dollars, collectively. We ask that the City commit to fully funding the IOI contracts by providing the contracted providers with \$12.5 million of additional funding, to ensure that we can continue and grow the critical services we provide to both long-time and newly arrived immigrant New Yorkers.

Maintain Key to the City Funding

The New York City Council has consistently funded the fundamental, community-based Key to the City (KTTC) program, a long-standing collaboration between the New York Immigration Coalition and NYLAG. With the Council's continuing support, NYLAG and NYIC have been able to expand our screening clinics for immigrants in New York City and have increased the number of events to address some of the current need. We now conduct two large in-person Key to the City events each month and see more than 50 migrant families. We also have capacity for bi-monthly telephonic consultations for community members who cannot access in-person services or who find it more convenient to discuss their legal matter over the phone. KTTC provides legal orientations, information about city services, and individual legal screenings with robust advice and counsel and internal referrals to NYLAG's

range of legal services. We also provide simple brief services such as change of address and change of venues and refer eligible migrants to our other programming. This remains one of the only programs that is open to the public for walk-in consultations and on-line registration.

Continued Support for Legal Services in Hospitals through the Immigrant Health Initiative

NYLAG's LegalHealth Unit is a proud recipient of Immigrant Health Initiative (IHI) funding that provides free, comprehensive immigration legal services and Medicaid advocacy for immigrants receiving healthcare at NYC H+H. We are the nation's largest medical-legal partnership that provides general legal assistance in the healthcare setting to patients of hospitals and community health facilities. Many our clients are immigrants in need of medical treatment and care for severe and/or life-threatening illnesses. From FY22 to FY24, LegalHealth handled over 10,600 immigration cases immigrants at our legal clinics situated in over 38 hospitals or health clinics, including all the public hospitals throughout New York City and their Gotham sites. Our medical legal partnership can be the crucial link for H+H patients to receive lifesaving care such as transplants available only at private institutions and discharge to the community with home care or to long term care

Unfortunately, with the winddown of the ActionNYC Institutional/Hospital model, we had to reduce the level of immigration legal services available by 1,440 appointments which greatly impacts the resources available to H+H patients and has created a backlog of patients needing services. With the City's immigrants under attack, health consequences will be dire

LegalHealth's medical legal partnership model allows patients to receive direct referrals and appointments through their healthcare providers for immigration and Medicaid assistance. Patients choose between attending an on-site hospital legal clinic, or being scheduled for a tele-legal appointment to speak with an attorney. Like telehealth, our tele-legal model is patient/client centered allowing for the delivery of legal service for those immigrant patients too sick or too afraid to leave their homes. With each patient received (whether we meet in-person at the hospital clinic, bed-side in the hospital, or by telephone, we explore the immigrant's legal relief, answer their legal questions and debunk misinformation so that they may become more comfortable continuing their healthcare or receiving benefits. In FY24, IHI funding allowed NYLAG to support 540 clients across 622 cases. These services ranged from family petitions, applications for adjustment of status, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status, U/T visas for crime victims, and immigration benefits for victims of domestic violence under the Violence Against Women Act to green card replacements, visa extensions and naturalizations for immigrants with medical conditions preventing them from taking the civics exam.

The threat of increased enforcement activity against immigrants is chilling their willingness to seek healthcare: Immigrants are delaying preventive care for themselves and their children, they are delaying diagnostics and treatment for chronic care, and they are weighing the risks when attending medical appointments for serious illness, such as cancer. For example, a client we are assisting with a U Visa that would place her and her children on the path to permanent status in the U.S, revealed during our "Know Your Rights" counseling that she had been experiencing extreme pain in her abdomen for two months and expressed fear of her family history of colon cancer. When her attorney encouraged her to see her

doctor at H+H, she refused because she has fears over the ICE raids being reported in the media. It's now been three months and she continues to refuse a visit to the ER despite the extreme pain that some days keeps her from working.

Now is the time for the City to continue and increase its investment in immigrant health and restore appointments lost for immigration legal services in the hospital setting.

The City Council's funding of legal services helps fill gaps where no other financial support exists to provide services to vulnerable immigrants. It demonstrates the value you and your colleagues place in improving quality of life for our immigrant communities. It sends a message that our City cares about immigrants and their health because it strengthens our entire community. Continued and increased funding can help address these fears and normalize the experience of seeking legal assistance in NYC to minimize the toxic stress of the recent Executive Orders on immigration and the increased actual and expected immigration enforcement activities. Already, our hospital partners report that patients are afraid to attend medical appointments or follow through on legal services referrals.

LegalHealth's deep experience collaborating with NYC H+H and other partner hospitals, positions us perfectly to address these needs. Already, in response to the election, LegalHealth has trained 1500 healthcare providers through Town Hall webinars for our partner hospitals, and we continue to push out information through our provider network as the immigration landscape changes. The support we provide to our hospital partners helps staff and patients alike so that immigrants can be encouraged to continue to keep necessary medical and legal appointments and seek other services in the City. This outreach conveyed the legal information necessary for making informed decisions for better responses to new and hostile immigration policies.

Without continued and increased, funding of IHI, many immigrants will go without the legal assistance needed for not only health care, but for long-term or permanent solutions to their immigration status. Continued funding allows advocates to provide critical legal services to immigrants for a healthier and safer New York City for all of us.

Continued Investment in Legal Expertise and Long-Term Programming

To meet the incredible need for legal services, a vision for the long-term that invests in flexible programming and expertise is vitally important. In 2023, in response to the large numbers of newly arrived immigrants, community-based organizations and legal Service providers, NYLAG among them, came together to develop innovative programming to maximize the limited legal resources and personnel and to provide community oriented, high quality legal assistance. One of the programs that was developed during this process was the Pro Se Plus Project (PSPP), which was established through private investment and now receives support from the City and State. The PSPP, a collective of organizations including NYLAG, African Communities Together, Central American Legal Assistance (CALA), Catholic Migration Services (CMS), MASA, UnLocal, and Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid (VIA), aims to empower recently arrived migrants with the knowledge and tools to advocate for themselves throughout their immigration process and mobilizes community supporters. The PSPP believes that while full representation remains essential, pro se assistance that is robust and delivered by lawyers and non-lawyers who have meaningful training and supervision can fill some of the gaps in services. PSPP is also founded on the belief that while pro se application assistance is an important initial step, it is only the first part of a long and complicated process during which continued support and information are crucial.

Since its inception at the end of last year to date, PSPP has provided information, training, and pro se assistance to over 10,000 immigrants and supporters throughout New

York City. PSPP aims to empower the communities we serve through multiple means. The first is robust community education in multiple languages about the U.S. immigration system, and rights and how to navigate various processes. The PSPP is centering community-based organizations such as Venezuelan Immigrant Assistance (VIA), MASA, and African Communities Together to provide linguistically and culturally appropriate orientation, information, and guidance. However, legal orientation must be accompanied by a renewed investment in robust advice and counsel, pro se application assistance, and ongoing removal defense representation. Although the number of immigrants in removal proceedings has skyrocketed to more than one million pending cases nationwide⁴ while funding for removal defense legal services has largely remained static. As has often been reported, having legal representation makes a significant difference in the outcome of an asylum claim. It is critical that the city re-invest in attorneys to provide robust advice and counsel and full representation to not only this population of newly arrived asylum seekers but the thousands of other New York-based asylum seekers who have been on the waitlists of non-profit organizations for years.

After assisting with the preparation and filing of the pro se application, PSPP then supports in the critical next steps of an asylum applicant's journey, understanding that many newly arrived immigrants will have to navigate the entire process alone. PSPP answers follow-up questions about filings, provides guidance and support through the next phases of the immigration process, and, when the time is appropriate in a case, connect applicants when possible with full representation. To support asylum applicants through their immigration process, PSPP provides robust trainings about asylum law, immigration court and its processes, and about how to represent yourself in an asylum hearing.

NYLAG asks that the investment the City has made in PSPP to support asylum seekers and provide services to obtain work authorization and successfully conclude their asylum claim continue. The best protection from enforcement action for tens of thousands of asylum seekers and others in removal is to provide legal support and guidance for them to continue in the removal process where they are afforded rights and protections. PSPP funding should be sustained for the FY26.



New York Lawyers for the Public Interest
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**Testimony of Sophie Dalsimer, Co-Director of Health Justice at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest to the New York City Council Committee on Immigration
March 6, 2025, regarding the New York City FY26 Budget**

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

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

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

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

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

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

New York City's FY 2026 Budget

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

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

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

Immigrant Health Initiative

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

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

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

As we start the new City Council term, NYLPI would like to underscore the work we have implemented across the City since the inception of the Council's Immigrant Health Initiative. This funding has allowed our efforts to continue without pause and respond to ever-increasing need. Due to the growing and ever-changing complexity of immigration cases and the challenges placed on immigration processes, especially given the arrival of thousands of migrants to the

City in recent years and a hostile federal administration, **we are seeking a \$650,000 allocation from the City Council's Immigrant Healthcare Initiative in CFY 2026.** This request includes the \$435,504 allocated in CFY 2025, plus an enhancement to support the increase in need from the previous fiscal year.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NYLPI has for years documented the egregious conditions within ICE detention centers where many New York City residents have suffered medical neglect and lack of disability accommodations causing severe health consequences and other dignitary harms. Far from keeping us safe, immigration enforcement has disastrous impacts on the health and well-being of New York City families and communities.

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

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

Many people arrested by ICE in New York City are detained at Orange County Jail (OCJ) in Goshen, NY. OCJ is notoriously dangerous and abusive. In previous hearings before this council, directly impacted New Yorkers testified about the conditions in the jail. People reported unsanitary conditions, exceedingly cold temperatures, inedible and inadequate food. Testimony and legal claims have also highlighted that officers at OCJ are abusive: they make xenophobic

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

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

and racist comments, including using the N word; scream at detainees for not speaking in English; threaten to put detainees in solitary confinement for wearing a sweater in freezing temperatures; and regularly fail to provide appropriate meals and prayer spaces. There are widespread reports of physical violence and excessive force by OCJ officers, including pepper spraying, kicking, and punching people involved in nonviolent protest.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Advocating for the Rights of Immigrant New Yorkers of Transgender Experience

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

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

Nonprofit Rapid Response Network

The new federal administration is focusing tremendous power on mass deportations, revocation of racial justice initiatives, claw backs of climate and environmental justice funding, and retribution against those who stand up to it. The human cost to New York's disadvantaged communities will be staggering. Nonprofits and CBOs serving or employing immigrants and other marginalized groups will form a critical shield but are also becoming direct targets of federal agencies attempting to conduct raids, chill advocacy, and cut services to people in need.⁵

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

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

Conclusion

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

**Sophie Dalsimer, Health Justice Program
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sdalsimer@nylpi.org**

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

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

For more information visit: www.nylpi.org



**Testimony for the
CITY COUNCIL FY 26 PRELIMINARY BUDGET
Topic: Immigration
March 6, 2025
Committee on Immigration, Chair Alexa Aviles**

Submitted by Kimberly George, President and CEO, Project Guardianship

Thank you, Chair Aviles and fellow committee members, for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Kimberly George, and I am the President and CEO of Project Guardianship. Project Guardianship provides person-centered guardianship services to New Yorkers with no other option. We also work to promote and develop less restrictive alternatives to guardianship and advocate for critical improvements to the Article 81 guardianship system in New York State.

In New York, guardians play a key role in protecting vulnerable people who have lost capacity, including older adults, immigrants, and those experiencing mental health crises. For older adults with cognitive decline, a guardian may be appointed to manage their finances, ensure they attend medical appointments, and support their social engagement within the community. For immigrants, guardianship can be especially complex, as legal status may impact access to healthcare, social services, and protections in cases of incapacity. In these instances, a guardian may be appointed to ensure that essential care is provided. For individuals experiencing mental health crises, a guardian can play a vital role in securing public benefits, ensuring access to medication, and stabilizing their well-being.

Regardless of the circumstances that lead to the need for guardianship, Article 81 of New York's Mental Hygiene Law mandates that anyone requiring a guardian shall have one appointed. However, in practice, access to guardianship services is far from guaranteed. Unless an individual has a family member or friend able to serve as a guardian or the financial means to pay for a private guardian, they may experience significant delays or even fail to receive appropriate guardianship at all. A recent survey of guardianship judges across New York State found that courts are unable to find guardians to appoint in approximately one-third of cases where guardianship is deemed necessary. In New York City, that figure rises to one-half. When a judge is unable to appoint a guardian, the individuals who need them may face prolonged periods without critical decisions being made on their behalf—including life-altering choices such as end-of-life care. In some cases, those in need may be assigned a guardian who lacks the qualifications, commitment, or person-centered approach that every New Yorker deserves.



As advocates for New Yorkers in need of surrogate decision-makers, we recognize the essential role of a well-funded, efficient guardianship system in ensuring care, protection, and dignity for all, particularly older adults, individuals with disabilities, immigrants, and other marginalized populations. While we appreciate Governor Hochul’s acknowledgment of the state’s aging population, the absence of dedicated funding for guardianship services significantly undermines the ability of nonprofits to meet the rising demand. Without adequate resources, individuals in dire need of guardianship services face long waitlists or may be assigned unqualified or exploitative guardians, placing their health, safety, and dignity at serious risk.

For the past thirty years, nonprofit organizations have stepped in to fill the gap, raising both private and public funds to provide high-quality guardianship services for those with no other options. These organizations deliver holistic care that not only enhances quality of life but also reduces unnecessary institutionalization, helping vulnerable New Yorkers remain in their homes and communities. A recent study of Project Guardianship’s services found that by minimizing hospitalizations and prolonged nursing home stays, nonprofit guardianship programs save the public an average of \$67,000 per client annually, largely through Medicaid savings. If nonprofits were funded to meet the full demand for guardianship services statewide, the estimated public savings would exceed \$85 million per year.

The recent passage of New York City Council Resolution 0561—which urges the State Legislature to introduce and pass, and the Governor to sign, legislation establishing a statewide public guardianship system in partnership with reputable nonprofit providers—is an important step forward. However, over 60 percent of all guardianship arrangements in the state occur within New York City. As demographic shifts continue—including the rapid growth of the older adult population, rising cases of Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias, and the ongoing mental health crisis—we cannot afford to wait for state intervention. We urge our local leaders to take immediate action by allocating funding to support these critical services in our communities.

Project Guardianship commends Chair Alexa Aviles and the Immigration Committee for their dedication to addressing the needs of New York’s older and disabled populations. Thank you for your leadership and commitment to protecting our most vulnerable residents.

RUSSIAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY COUNCIL (RCC)

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Testimony

to the New York City Council Immigration Committee Preliminary Budget Hearing

by Dmitri Daniel Glinski, President & CEO, RCC

March 6, 2025

Thank you, Committee - and thank you, City Council, for your system of public testimonies, which is about the only venue at any level of government where a voice from my community can be heard on a par with others – in any language. Muchisimas gracias.

The Russian-speaking Community Council that I co-founded in 2011 is a CBO of refugees and de facto refugees from ex-Soviet countries, serving them - and thus our City - mainly through local and federal advocacy, organizing, and countering hate with our Antiwar dialogue of Ukrainians and Russians since 2014; but also, from time to time, with pro bono immigration services (including, years ago, under DYCD contracts awarded by the Council); with case management and material aid under New York State's Assistance to Migrants Program (until last year); with Know Your Rights webinars; by hosting MOIA's English classes; and in other ways.

I could add a lot to what others say on the urgency of restoring vital services that have been hanging on life support under this Mayor. Yet I keep coming here to urge you to act on an issue that you won't hear from others: it is the disparate impact of the current funding system for our CBOs, - or, as some of us say, systemic inequity and exclusion. Russian is the third-largest linguistic minority in our city, over 2 percent of its population; Ukrainian speaking community has also grown considerably. Just in the past three years, tens of thousands of Ukrainians and Russians fled here from military invasion, or from reprisals for protesting it, or from mobilization into the invading army. Yet – in contrast to some smaller and equally deserving diasporas - you will barely find a \$5,000 award for their CBOs in Schedule C, year after year, and never any award that would cover a lawyer's (or any other staff) salary. And it's just the same with private foundations (except there are no public hearings involved). This keeps our hard-working CBOs without regular staff - which, in turn, is used to deny funding due to low capacity. This perpetuates discrimination on the individual

level – as I keep hearing, even during our session today, from Russian-speaking asylum seekers still stuck in city shelter; they just wrote to me that their applications for housing vouchers are being delayed by their case managers, some of whom openly admit to clients that Russians are being discriminated against.

I urge all of you here to spread the word about this glaring lack of the much needed equity and inclusion with regard to our people and their CBOs – at the time when the Trump Administration has paused processing all applications by Ukrainian parolees many of whom have no homes to return to; and when Russians who came legally via CBP One are kept in remote detention centers for many months, often without any steady connection to a lawyer, and at times even after winning their asylum case.

Meanwhile, their invaders or oppressors back home – the root cause of their migration - have powerful business partners in our city, represented on the boards of some of our key philanthropies and in this City Hall up to the commissioner level. They are using their clout to prevent those who fled from them from succeeding in New York, let alone getting funded to serve others. And they've been greatly emboldened by the Trump Administration.

I call upon those in our Council who are interested in gaining strategic allies in the defense of our democracy and the rule of law to support refugees and de facto refugees from our countries. Funding more targeted legal services in Ukrainian and Russian through our own and other CBOs would be the first step. But I also urge you - and through you, Speaker Adams, - to go further and consider a Special Response Initiative for refugees and exiles from dictatorships, from Venezuela to Russia and all those in between, aiming to provide them with a community home and a public platform, as a counterweight to their oppressors who are busy corrupting our system. Going through the second decade of advocacy at these Council hearings, we at RCC are open to partnerships to serve our own people as well as refugees and exiles from autocracies around the world. Thank you.



**Testimony to the New York City Council City Council
Committee on Immigration**

March 6, 2025

Good afternoon. My name is Carina Kaufman-Gutierrez and I am the Deputy Director at the Street Vendor Project. I would like to thank Chair Aviles and the Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

The Street Vendor Project (SVP) is a membership-based organization with more than 3,000 vendor members including small business consultations, legal representation and access to a wide variety of resource. We are the only organization that provides multilingual, accessible services to street vendors in NYC, a growing workforce of more than 23,000. The vending industry has grown exponentially in the past year as many newly arrived migrants and asylum seeks are turning to vending for survival, leading to a 30% increase in SVP's membership in the past three years.

In 2024, SVP served 144 New York City zip codes, advised 793 vendors on vending rules and regulations, saving each vendor on average of \$800 a year in fines, and won 194 cases on summonses issued by City agencies, connecting through street outreach, distributing materials like KYR with ICE for Street Vendors that we created. Given the diversity of our membership, our services are offered in 7 different languages, Arabic, Bangla, English, French, Mandarin, Spanish and Wolof, thanks to the diversity of our small team of 5 organizers and 2 small business

staff. But we are stretched incredibly thin, and there is a desperate need for investment in these critical education services.

We respectfully request \$500,000 in support from New York City Council to conduct Outreach and Education services to street vendors. This is in comparison to the \$3.7 million the City Issues to the office of street vendor enforcement.

96% of street vendors are immigrants who hail from across the globe of mixed immigration status. Vendors are particularly vulnerable to interactions with ICE enforcement due to the nature of their work, serving New Yorkers in public spaces. Additionally street vendors have been at increased risk due to this administration's policy of skyrocketing the number of NYPD criminal summonses to street vendors, issuing 2,037 criminal summonses in 2024, nearly doubling the 1,244 criminal summonses issued in 2023.

I am here today to respectfully request support from New York City Council so that SVP can both continue and expand weekly street outreach and host monthly workshops to vendors across the five boroughs, distributing small business resources, education, and Know Your Rights materials in 7 languages to immigrant vendors, ensuring they have with the tools they need to protect themselves while also connecting them with the essential resources they desperately need and may not know exist.

Street vendors, like all New Yorkers, deserve a fair chance to work hard and make a living, free from harassment. Vendors who are immigrants make our city's vibrant food culture, and embody NYC's entrepreneurial spirit. When they are allowed to flourish, vendors create jobs, anchor communities, and provide healthy and affordable food.

To: New York City Council Committee on Immigration

Re: File # T2025-3404; Preliminary Budget Hearing—Immigration

From: Lewie Briggs, Senior Staff Attorney, Immigrants' Rights Practice, TakeRoot Justice

Date: March 6, 2025

TakeRoot Justice provides legal, participatory research and policy support to strengthen the work of grassroots and community-based groups in New York City to dismantle racial, economic, and social oppression. Our Immigrants' Rights Practice partners with community-based immigrant organizing groups to provide their members with legal representation, community education, advocacy and support for community-based defensive strategies. Because our community-based partners are well-established within the immigrant communities they serve, our model ensures that even those fearful in this political climate have ready access to critical legal services and up-to-date information from a known and trusted partner.

We commend this Council for the immense investments it has made over many years to protect and uplift immigrant communities in New York City. Especially in times such as these, where low-income immigrant communities of color are experiencing heightened hostility and violence from the federal government, increasingly in unlawful collusion with the Mayor's office and City agencies, we are grateful to members of this Council for each of your individual efforts and commitments to the fight to keep our City's immigrant communities safe.

TakeRoot Justice is the lead organization in the Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative (CILEC), a consortium of immigrant service providers and a recipient of Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI) funds. When CILEC first received funding from IOI in 2015, we were tasked to work with community-based organizations to reach immigrants and workers, educating them about their rights, supporting them in pro se advocacy, and providing them with legal representation. Since then, with that mandate in mind, TakeRoot Justice has provided complex immigration legal representation for thousands of New Yorkers, helping many gain status and stability through relief pathways like asylum, special immigrant juvenile status, VAWA, and U and T visas, to name just a few. In addition, and equally, if not more important in the current climate, we have conducted hundreds of legal clinics and know your rights trainings for our community-based partner organizations and their members.

But while we and our fellow service providers have continued to grow and build our services and our partnerships, we have not received any increase in IOI funding—COLA or otherwise—since FY20. Unfortunately, this means that many IOI providers have had to subsidize the contract significantly to

be able to continue the work they have been doing so persistently and passionately for so long. For reference, currently, IOI providers would need an IOI funding increase of more than 50 percent just to meet costs—a very low standard for a city of immigrants like ours.

Yet, in the most recent RFP announcement for the IOI contract for FY26—now pushed to FY27—the total award announced does not come anywhere close to funding the full cost of the existing program, let alone allow providers to meet the increased needs we are currently experiencing and anticipate over the next four years. In fact, along with changes making deliverables more rigid, legal services providers will need to handle more cases than they currently do to receive the same funding they have been getting since 2019. This is an unsustainable trend and must be addressed. More and more, we are witnessing lawyers passionate about this work being forced to move to private practice or to leave the field entirely due to the inability of service providers to adequately pay them. For service providers to retain and hire the staff needed to perform high quality, impactful work, the award amount and case rate must be substantially increased to, at minimum, match recent inflation and cost of living adjustments, and the annual award amounts must account for COLA increases over the life of the contract.

Additionally, the new IOI proposed contract no longer accounts for community outreach and education. And it removes brief services, including advice and counsel, from the scope of work. This is a step in the wrong direction. We can say without hesitation that even in the first two months of the Trump administration, the work we have done in partnership with immigrant led community-based organizations in many of the Council Members' districts has proven essential in equipping immigrant communities to defend themselves against the ruses of ICE. In the past three weeks alone, we have partnered with community organizations such as Adhikaar in Woodside, Damayan Migrant Workers' Association in Hell's Kitchen, Desis Rising Up & Moving in Jackson Heights, and Haitian Women for Haitian Refugees in Flatbush, to provide emergency clinics, to train members about their rights, and to help form rapid response networks to empower communities facing ICE enforcement. We are also actively building out a rapid response program for our partners to provide first responder intakes when ICE arrests occur. This work has been, in part, made possible by the stability and flexibility of the City's IOI funding. Work that, under the new proposed terms of the IOI contract for FY27, would no longer be funded. Increasing the rigidity of deliverables in this way not only makes the work more onerous by creating more work for less pay as mentioned above, but it also creates obstacles by dramatically reducing flexibility over the use of such funds—something that service providers cannot afford.

While, again, we are immensely grateful for the funds that the City has granted for services to immigrant communities through IOI funding, to adequately provide immigrant communities with

the services they need, keeping in mind the antagonism we expect over the next four years, we call on this Council to help us push the administration to (1) substantially increase the IOI award amount and case rate for FY27 to match recent inflation and cost of living adjustments; (2) account for cost of living adjustment increases over the life of the contract; and (3) restore the community outreach, education and brief services aspect of the IOI contract.

Now more than ever, it is essential that the City invest significant resources in legal services to defend immigrants from deportation and keep families together. By increasing the funding provided for immigration legal services, the City will be making an investment not only in the wellbeing of immigrant communities but in New York City as a whole. We look forward to our continued partnership with the City Council, City agencies, community-based organizations and our fellow legal service providers to ensure that New York's immigrant communities have access to the high-quality legal services they need.

Respectfully,

Lewie Briggs

Senior Staff Attorney

TakeRoot Justice

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New York, NY 10038

THE BRONX DEFENDERS

**New York City Council
Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2024
Committee on Immigration
March 7, 2025
Testimony of The Bronx Defenders
By Karla Ostolaza, Managing Director, Immigration**

Good afternoon. My name is Karla Marie Ostolaza, and I am the Managing Director of the Immigration Practice at The Bronx Defenders (BxD). I would like to thank the New York City Council for its unwavering support of New York City immigrant communities and the legal providers that serve them. Today, we urgently request \$33.2 million for the New York Family Unity Project (NYIFUP), double the current budget, to ensure that detained New Yorkers in deportation proceedings continue to have access to universal legal representation.

I. The Bronx Defenders Immigration Practice

Twenty-three years ago, BxD embraced the model of holistic representation by embedding immigration legal services within a public defender office. Our robust immigration practice today consists of over fifty attorneys, social workers, advocates, and administrative professionals. We provide deportation defense in both detained and non-detained courts. We also offer integrated, holistic representation to mitigate or avoid negative immigration consequences for our clients targeted by the criminal and family regulation systems.

Our advocates provide these services within three related but distinct programs: (1) representation of currently and formerly detained people through NYIFUP, (2) our Padilla team that provides wrap-around immigration advice and services to people with pending criminal and family court proceedings, and (3) our open-door community intake program that serves Bronx residents at risk of detention and deportation.

II. BxD's NYIFUP Program

In this testimony, I will explain why NYIFUP work continues to serve a critical role in protecting immigrant communities from ICE's mass detention and deportation campaign, and why a significant investment in our program is of critical importance to protect our mission of providing universal representation to detained New Yorkers.

A. NYIFUP is Essential in Fighting Against ICE's Mass Deportation Campaign

In February, ICE's total detained population hit 41,161, the highest number since the first Trump administration.¹ Those numbers were the result of the highest jump in ICE's detainee population in a two-week period, despite a sharp decline in people detained at the southern border. Of those in detention, 87% are facing removal proceedings.² The key takeaway from these figures is that ICE is aggressively targeting our immigrant communities and expanding the need for detained removal defense. This surge in detentions has placed an overwhelming strain on our ability to provide representation to those in need, making the requested increase in funding critical.

The realization that 97% of detained immigrants without legal representation are unsuccessful in challenging their deportation and that access to representation increases the chance of winning a deportation case by more than 1000% propelled this Council to launch the NYIFUP pilot twelve years ago and to champion its mission ever since.³ Over the past decade, this Council has also witnessed how by reducing the amount of time our clients spend in ICE custody, we lower the social and economic costs of homelessness, foster care, and unemployment created by immigration detentions and avoidable deportations.

Today, more than ever, it is critical to strengthen and scale up the NYIFUP program to meet the need of detained immigrant New Yorkers. At a time when the Trump administration is doubling down on targeting our friends, family, and neighbors, we need proportional resources to fight back and preserve the integrity of our communities and families. Our recent clients include long term green card holders detained at JFK after returning from visiting family abroad, undocumented parents and spouses of US citizens swept up in home raids and on their way to work, and asylum seekers detained at ICE check ins in front of their children while doing exactly what our government asked them to do. We are confident that we can bring many of them back home if given the proper resources, and more importantly, regardless of the outcome, our attorneys, social workers, and legal advocates can accompany and support each one of them and their families to mitigate the harm caused by our cruel immigration policies.

¹ **Austin Kocher**, *ICE's Latest Detention Data Shows*, **Substack**, March 6, 2025, <https://austinkocher.substack.com/p/ices-latest-detention-data-shows>.

² **Jacob Soboroff**, *New ICE Data Shows the Administration Isn't Just Arresting Criminals*, **NBC News**, March 7, 2025, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/new-ice-data-shows-administration-isnt-just-arresting-criminals-rcna192656>.

³ **New York City Council**, *Council Passes Landmark Legislation to Provide Legal Representation for Immigrants Facing Deportation*, New York City Council, July 19, 2013, <https://council.nyc.gov/press/2013/07/19/471/>.

While NYIFUP has made significant strides in defending detained New Yorkers, the rapid increase in detentions and changes in ICE's tactics necessitate a significant increase in resources to maintain our effectiveness.

B. NYIFUP Needs Adequate Resources to Continue Serving All Detained New Yorkers Facing Deportation Proceedings

The mission of NYIFUP is to represent every detained New Yorker in deportation proceedings who cannot afford an attorney. We are determined to continue carrying out this important role. However, financial strains resulting from inflation and operational challenges posed by ICE's new detention patterns are a threat to our work. We need a significant investment to ensure that we can keep our promise to New Yorkers: no detained immigrant will have to fight against deportation alone.

Both the rapid increase in ICE detentions and the practices of the agency are straining our resources. The aggressive increase in detentions since January has resulted in the Varick Street Immigration Court doubling the number of initial dockets held every week. As a result, not only do we have additional clients to represent, but also must spend considerable resources observing hearings to identify pro se respondents since neither EOIR nor ICE is willing to work with us to streamline this process.

Additionally, ICE now detains a large number of New York City residents at the Moshannon Valley Processing Center in Pennsylvania and dockets their cases at Elizabeth, New Jersey. Given the volume of hearings at this court, which presides over cases of detainees from three different states, court observation is not practicable. Instead, our program has coordinated with services providers in New Jersey and Pennsylvania to establish a system for detention screenings and cross-referrals. While we are fortunate that New Jersey and Philadelphia have endeavored to establish universal representation programs inspired by NYIFUP that have become crucial partners in preventing New Yorkers from falling through the cracks, operating this alternative intake system requires significant resources.

We anticipate the need to remain nimble and responsive to additional transfers of New Yorkers before the initiation of removal proceedings and the corresponding need to invest resources in locating prospective clients in faraway locations. Currently, most of our clients' cases are venued either in the Second or Third Circuit. When our clients are transferred to detention centers outside of our area, our offices need to invest resources in learning the controlling caselaw of other circuits and seek admission to the federal courts with jurisdiction over challenges to our client's detention and removal proceedings. In FY24, our team had pending cases on behalf of NYIFUP clients in three different circuits and five district courts. While we have the experience and skills to engage in complex

litigation wherever our clients need it, we need the resources to allow for this additional work.

NYIFUP's funding has remained flat for five years, despite the rapid growth of inflation over this period. The combination of inflation's impact on our budget and the increased cost of operating the program due to ICE's new detention practices poses an imminent threat to our ability to provide universal representation. The City Council must act now to ensure we can continue providing universal representation to detained New Yorkers.

NYIFUP has the capacity to build up its program and address the increased need for our services. NYIFUP holistic advocates have represented thousands of clients over the past twelve years. Our team has the expertise and passion to attract and train a new generation of advocates to help us scale up our program and meet the moment. BxD has an extensive in-house training program, mentoring infrastructure, and a nationally recognized trial-skills program to support new and experienced attorneys joining our team.

C. Systemic Litigation and Victories

NYIFUP advocacy continues to lead to positive outcomes for individuals and their families, as well as for New York's larger immigrant community. Below are just a few examples of the impact of NYIFUP's advocacy and the individual cases represent a broader reality faced by many New Yorkers, where families are torn apart, lives are disrupted, and the need for universal legal representation has never been greater.

- Mr. SO, a Staten Island resident, has lived in the United States for over two decades and has 4 U.S. citizen children and 2 U.S. citizen stepsons, one of whom serves in the military. Mr. SO's two youngest children have autism, and for one of them, the condition is so severe that he will never be able to live independently. Mr. SO was detained and placed into removal proceedings by ICE following a DWI conviction that was later overturned on the merits. Mr. SO is the primary breadwinner for his family and a crucial source of support for his children. During his detention, the family almost became unhoused and one of his children developed mental health symptoms. Through the advocacy of his BxD NYIFUP legal team, Mr. SO was released from detention. BxD continued representing Mr. SO after his release. Over four years after his release, Mr. SO late last year won a conditional grant of cancellation of removal, which is a pathway to obtaining lawful permanent resident status. After this grant, his children can finally live with the peace and assurance that Mr. SO will be here and that his children with special needs will continue being able to access their critical educational and support systems here.

- Ms. L fled to the United States after experiencing extreme physical, emotional, and sexual abuse from her former partner who is also a member of a powerful gang. After initially releasing her at the border, ICE gave Ms. L. a date to check-in with them at 26 Federal Plaza. Ms. L showed up as she was required and ICE detained her. Because of Ms. L's manner of entry into the U.S., she was not eligible for bond and remained detained in Pennsylvania—far away from her community of support—for over six months litigating her case. BxD's interdisciplinary legal team represented Ms. L, providing her legal and emotional support through the process. Earlier this year, the immigration judge granted Ms. L asylum. ICE waived appeal and finally released Ms. L who is now back home.
- *Reid v. Garland*
 - In November 2024, the Second Circuit issued a precedential decision establishing a framework for what the Immigration Court must do in cases with indicia of incompetency (including making an explicit finding, which judges in our clients' cases routinely fail to do) and addresses appropriate safeguards, including termination of proceedings. BxD is a signatory to the legal service providers' amicus that is cited in the decision, which highlighted our clients' experiences. Mr. Reid was represented by Brooklyn Defender Services through NYIFUP.
- *Ortiz et al. v. Orange County, NY et al.*
 - In BxD's federal lawsuit against Orange County Jail (OCJ) and ICE for retaliation against 6 NYIFUP clients for the 2022 hunger strike, the court granted our request to include claims related to new retaliatory actions against one of our clients, overcoming ICE's opposition and allowing the case to move forward with discovery. The Center for Constitutional Rights and the New York American Civil Liberties Union are BxD's co-counsel in this ongoing litigation.

III. BxD's Community Intake Program (Funding Request: \$200,000)

Through our open-door practice, the Bronx Immigration Community Intake Project provides early intervention, legal representation, and assistance navigating the immigration legal system to Bronx residents. While in New York City clients are entitled to an attorney when in criminal court, facing abuse and neglect allegations in family court, or in detained deportation proceedings, there is no such guaranteed funding for legal

representation for early advocacy crucial to prevent people from becoming ensnared in the deportation machine in the first place. Now more than ever, Bronx residents need access to skilled immigration attorneys for advice and representation. The requested funding in the amount of \$200,000 would help expand the program's capacity and reduce our waitlist. Community intake attorneys represent a full caseload of clients, which includes motions to reopen deportation orders, advocacy on behalf of lawful permanent residents subject to secondary inspection at JFK, deportation defense cases, complex affirmative cases before USCIS, and early intervention to provide community members in-depth analyses of their risks of deportation and detention. Our program is unique in that it prioritizes providing early intervention and removal defense to Bronx residents with prior contacts with the criminal legal or family regulation systems. This is a segment of the population which has a particularly challenging time accessing legal services due to the complexity of their cases and the limited resources available in the community, while also being considered a priority for ICE surveillance and detention. We consistently have a waitlist because demand for our services far exceeds our capacity. We are seeking funding to support and increase our capacity to do this critical work.

IV. Conclusion

We are committed to defending detained New Yorkers and those at the intersection of immigration, criminal, and family law. To continue this vital work, we need robust funding to expand our capacity and meet the growing demand. We thank you for your unwavering support and for ensuring immigrant New Yorkers have the legal representation they deserve.



To: New York City Council Committee on Immigration & Committee on General Welfare

From: Meena Shah esq., Co Director, The Door's Legal Services Center

Re: Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026, the Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2026-2029, and the Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report

Date: March 6, 2025

The Door is a comprehensive youth development organization that has been supporting vulnerable youth in New York City since 1972. Each year, we provide services to nearly 9,000 young people between the ages of 12 and 24, many of them immigrants. The services we provide include healthcare, education, supportive housing, food and nutrition, career development, arts and recreation, mental health counseling, and legal assistance — all under one roof. We are also a Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) Runaway and Homeless Youth drop-in center, providing food, clothing, showers, laundry, and case management services to young people who are unhoused or unstably housed. At The Door, we emphasize empowering and engaging the young people we serve, and we are committed to creating a safe, equitable, and inclusive space for young people and staff. The Legal Services Center at The Door is an office of over 50 individuals, including attorneys, social workers, and support staff. We specialize in serving vulnerable children and young people, including many clients who are unhoused, undocumented, and/or LGBTQIA+.

Our attorneys represent youth in removal proceedings before immigration courts, as well as those seeking to regularize their status through the filing of affirmative humanitarian applications. In 2024, we handled 3,3390 immigration matters for young people. We also operate several free legal clinics, including a weekly drop-in legal clinic for runaway/homeless youth, in response to increasing demand, primarily serves recent immigrants. The need and demand for services grows every week and we do not have enough capacity to keep up. The vast majority of these young people that we have screened at our clinics are eligible for immigration benefits or relief from removal, but we do not have the capacity to represent them. Without a lawyer, it is difficult and essentially a practical impossibility for a young person to navigate the immigration system without an attorney.

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The Door's Discretionary Funding

The Door is a recipient of Discretionary Funding that has allowed us to offer wrap-around services to our immigrant youth members. The Door is a recipient of ICARE funding as well as recipients of Welcome to NYC funding. With City Council funding, we offer direct representation for immigrant youth in New York as well as Know Your Rights Trainings, legal clinics, and brief services to triage and prioritize urgent cases for immigrant youth. We urge City Council to scale up funding in response to the increasing and shifting needs for immigrant youth.

Navigating hostile administration for immigrant youth

Under the current federal administration, we are facing an increasingly hostile climate for immigrant youth that depend on the Door's vital services. Since January 20, 2025, ICE has rescinded sensitive location memoranda, begun wide-scale enforcement actions, expanded expedited removal from two weeks to two years, implemented executive orders purporting to unconstitutionally end birthright citizenship, and ended vital parole programs for immigrants fleeing their home countries. Notably, the Door is fielding calls from young people inquiring if it's safe for them to attend school or go to a doctor's appointment for fear of ICE detaining them and shattering their dreams.

Due to the bureaucratic and confusing policies impacting immigrants transferred in and out of the HERCCS, we are deeply concerned about the youth housed in these adult shelters. Many of them qualify for relief but are not receiving notice of their court dates, as they lack a reliable way to receive their mail. As a result, they are missing these critical court dates and are ordered removed *in absentia*, without ever having received notice of their court date. These young people are considered high risk for deportation and need access to legal representation to help mitigate the consequences of these violations of their due process rights. These youth are facing deportation to countries where they fled conflict and extreme forms of violence.

These young people rely on the Door for drop-services as well as receive critical information about their rights as they navigate these systems.

Federal funding is imperiled

On February 18th, without warning, HHS (through the U.S. Department of the Interior) issued a national contract stop work order for Legal Services for Unaccompanied Children, effective immediately, impacting providers nationwide. The Door represents immigrant youth under these

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federal contracts, both while they are detained in facilities in New York and after their release to sponsors and family members in the NYC area. In just four months, between October 2024 and January 31, 2025, Office of Refugee Resettlement released 1,131 unaccompanied children to sponsors in New York State. In prior fiscal years, more than 8,000 youth were released in New York State. Although the stop work order was later rescinded the battle for federal funding for unaccompanied children is far from over. On March 30, this contract year will end and we are concerned that the federal government may decide not to continue this contract into the next fiscal year. This would have a catastrophic impact on unaccompanied children in New York City.

The recent federal funding freeze exposed how fragile support for unaccompanied children's legal services is. With continued threats of deportations and funding cuts, New York must step up to protect young immigrants.

As Mayor Adams noted in his testimony on March 5th in front of Congress, New York benefits to the tune of billions of dollars of tax revenue from immigrant New Yorkers. NYC is a vibrant hub for immigrants of all backgrounds. Immigrant New Yorkers are an intrinsic and essential part of New York City.

Discretionary Funding from City Council has improved the lives of immigrant youth

ICARE has not received a funding increase in six years. We urge City Council to fully fund ICARE at the Coalition's request of \$6,297,250. The Door will receive \$900,000 of that figure to continue to build up our capacity to meet the growing need for effective, comprehensive, zealous legal representation for immigrant youth. Additionally, The Door receives \$40,000 through Welcome to NYC funding and we hope that we can continue to rely City Council's support on these initiatives that support and fund vital legal services for immigrant youth.

ICARE and Welcome to NYC's critical funding has provided the Door with funding to directly represent immigrant youth and to support our wrap around services for immigrant youth. This support has transformed the lives and futures for these vulnerable young people.

We screened a young man from South America who was about to turn 21. This young person was sexually abused by trusted family members in his home country. Upon coming out as gay, he was kicked out home. Unfortunately, he ended up fleeing his home country because he was seen by gang members with his boyfriend, and they attacked him and threatened to kill him because of his sexuality. Our interdisciplinary team was able to spring into action and intake his case,

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timely filing emergency petitions in family court, filing his SIJS petition, and his asylum petition. We connected him to vital supportive services. He now has work authorization, and his attorney was able to get proceedings dismissed in immigration court. Our team social worker assisted him in applying for college and he was recently accepted to a local community college. The Door has countless stories like these, demonstrating the possibilities that adequately funded, comprehensive immigration representation can have to transform the lives of immigrant youth. Our work supports them not only in their legal cases, but also in empowering them to pursue their dreams, to thrive, and to build a brighter future. By equipping young people with the tools to succeed, we invest in our future and in building stronger, prosperous, and healthier communities.

Thank you,

Meena Shah, esq.
Co-Director
The Door Legal Service Center

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**TESTIMONY BEFORE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL'S
COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION**

Presented on March 6, 2025

My name is Deborah Lee, and I am the Attorney-in-Charge of the Immigration Law Unit (ILU) at The Legal Aid Society (LAS). Throughout our nearly 150-year history, LAS has been a tireless advocate for those least able to advocate for themselves. Over 2,300 staff members operate across all five New York City boroughs in our Civil, Criminal Defense, and Juvenile Rights Practices – guided by the fundamental principle that nobody should be denied justice because of poverty. Combining the expertise gained from representing clients across diverse areas of law with the broader public policy perspective of an advocacy group, we lift up marginalized individuals and enable them to advance themselves and their families. Part direct legal services provider, part social justice defenders, we have a unique ability to go beyond individual issues to affect change at a societal level.

Since the 1980s, LAS has maintained a citywide Immigration Law Unit (ILU) within the Civil Practice. ILU, now comprised of over 88 staff, is a recognized leader in the delivery of free, comprehensive, and high-caliber immigration legal services to low-income immigrants in New York City and surrounding counties. Staff represent immigrants before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), before immigration judges in removal proceedings, on appeals to the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), and in federal court on *habeas corpus* petitions and petitions for review. Over the most recent year, ILU assisted in over 8,500 individual legal matters benefiting over 21,100 New Yorkers citywide. In addition to direct legal services, we conduct outreach presentations with community members and grass-roots organizations and provide critical immigration legal information to New Yorkers through our Know Your Rights hub on our website¹ and our dedicated legal helpline telephone bank. We also provide regular trainings to immigrant-serving advocates from community-based organizations, state and local agencies, and judicial and legislative staff. Partnerships with other non-profit organizations and coordination of a successful *pro bono* program with nearly 70 participating law firms enable the ILU to maximize resources to meet the increasing demand for representation.

¹ <https://legalaidnyc.org/news/critical-resources-immigrant-communities/>.

LAS' testimony here presents our challenges under the current Trump administration as well as our funding requests for our New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP), Youth, and federal litigation, and Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI)-related work.

Immigrants built our great City, and we are proud to honor our own histories, our loved ones, friends, and neighbors. LAS is committed to fighting for immigrants' rights on all of these fronts and respectfully calls upon this committee to take bold action in these turbulent times, and to lead this City in protecting the rights of non-citizen New Yorkers.

A. Trump 2.0 and Its Already Devastating Impact on New York City

Despite persistent challenges during the Biden administration, Trump 2.0 has already created pernicious barriers for non-citizen New Yorkers, as well as non-citizens generally in this country. Since January 20, 2025, the current Trump administration has issued over 165 policy actions that impact and harm non-citizens in this country.² Some of the most devastating actions include:

- On January 20, 2025, the Trump Administration sought to deny U.S. citizenship to those born in this country, specifically for two classes of children born after February 19, 2025: (a) a child of an unlawfully-present mother if the father is not a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident (LPR); and (b) a child of a mother with temporary status (e.g., a non-immigrant visa, Temporary Protected Status, etc.) if the father is not a U.S. citizen or LPR.³
- On January 20, 2025, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security revoked long-standing guidance protecting certain locations from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) enforcement actions.⁴ ICE is fully encouraged now to conduct arrests and raids in

² See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/?after=2025-01-20>; see also https://www.nycbar.org/reports/the-trump-administrations-early-2025-changes-to-immigration-law/?back=1#_ftn12.

³ This Executive Order is currently enjoined pursuant to a Temporary Restraining Order issued in *Washington v Trump*, 2:25-cv-00127 (W.D.Wash.), <https://s3.documentcloud.org/documents/25502861/tro-on-trump-executive-order-birthright-citizenship.pdf>.

⁴ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/dhs-rescinds-guidelines-for-enforcement-actions-in-or-near-protected-areas/#/tab-policy-overview>.

sensitive locations such as churches and religious sites, schools, funeral homes and hospitals. On January 22, 2025, ICE issued further guidance clarifying that it can and will conduct arrests in and near local courthouses, consistent with local laws, including in non-criminal courts.⁵

- On January 21, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security published notice in the Federal Register to fully expand Expedited Removal to any undocumented person who has been present in the United States for less than two years.⁶ If subject to Expedited Removal, that individual would be deprived of the right to present any defense before an Immigration Judge except in extremely limited circumstances; as a result, these individuals would be summarily detained and deported with no judicial review process.
- On January 25, 2025, ICE officials were instructed to comply with a quota of 75 arrests per day in each of its 25 field offices.⁷ Compared with 2024 ICE arrests nationally, this would result in a six-fold increase in ICE detentions nationwide.
- On January 29, 2025, the Immigration Court system issued guidance confirming that ICE would be allowed to freely arrest non-citizens attending Immigration Court hearings.⁸
- On January 29, 2025, the Immigration Court system rescinded its guidance to encourage the use of prosecutorial discretion in Immigration Court and Board of Immigration Appeals cases, which allowed for the dismissal of cases that were not enforcement priorities.⁹
- On January 29, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security revoked Temporary

⁵ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/ice-issues-interim-guidance-for-civil-immigration-enforcement-at-or-near-courthouses/#/tab-policy-documents>.

⁶ See <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/01/24/2025-01720/designating-aliens-for-expedited-removal>.

⁷ See <https://www.washingtonpost.com/immigration/2025/01/26/ice-arrests-raids-trump-quota/>.

⁸ See <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/media/1387301/dl?inline>.

⁹ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/eoir-acting-director-rescinds-pm-21-25/#/tab-policy-documents>.

Protected Status protections for Venezuelan nationals.¹⁰ Currently, those granted TPS based on the 2021 designation will have their TPS status terminated on September 10, 2025. Those who were granted TPS based on the 2023 designation will have their status terminate on April 7, 2025.

- On January 29, 2025, President Trump signed into law S.5, also known as the Laken Riley Act, which subjects non-citizens to mandatory detention for a wide range of offenses, including low level theft and shoplifting offenses.¹¹ This mandatory detention would be triggered not only where someone had been convicted of certain offenses but also when merely accused of them.
- On January 31, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued guidance saying that it is not required to consider whether an immigrant has been a victim of a crime when deciding whether to detain them.¹² This is alarming for those who may be in dangerous and vulnerable situations when ICE encounters them, leading to ICE to disregard crimes and maltreatment committed against unaccompanied children.
- On January 31, 2025, the Immigration Court system issued a directive undermining its Office of Legal Access Programs, which provides accreditation for nonprofits that use trained non-attorneys to provide legal assistance to indigent and vulnerable populations.¹³
- On February 3, 2025, the Immigration Court system issued guidance allowing the fast-tracking of asylum claim processing.¹⁴ This will permit Immigration Judges to reject

¹⁰ See <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/03/2025-02183/vacatur-of-2025-temporary-protected-status-decision-for-venezuela>.

¹¹ See <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/5/text>.

¹² See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/ice-rescinds-directive-110053-on-using-a-victim-centered-approach-with-noncitizen-crime-victims/#/tab-policy-documents>.

¹³ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/eoir-acting-director-issues-memo-on-eoirs-office-of-legal-access-programs/#/tab-policy-documents>.

¹⁴ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/eoir-acting-director-reinstates-policy/#/tab-policy-documents>.

asylum applications if not enough evidence is presented initially, create more barriers for asylum applicants to obtain work authorizations while their applications are pending, and generally reject any requests for additional time in Immigration Court.

- On February 20, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security revoked Temporary Protected Status protections for Haitian nationals.¹⁵ Currently, those granted TPS will have their TPS status terminated on August 3, 2025.
- On February 25, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security invoked a registration requirement for certain non-citizens, pursuant to Immigration and Nationality Law (“INA”) § 262 and 8 CFR § 264.1.¹⁶ A failure to register may result in criminal and civil penalties, up to and including misdemeanor prosecution and the payment of fines.
- On February 26, 2025, ICE announced that it had contracted with the Delaney Hall facility in Newark, New Jersey to detain up to 1,000 non-citizens.¹⁷
- On February 27, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security requested from the Internal Revenue Service the last known home addresses for non-citizens who had filed income tax returns.¹⁸

With the Trump 2.0 administration’s promise of mass deportations underway nationwide,¹⁹ our non-citizen family members, neighbors, and loved ones are being told repeatedly that ICE will hunt them down. Non-citizens in New York City – whether recent arrivals or long term residents - no longer feel safe accompanying their children to school, seeking medical care, attending a religious service, or even going to their own Immigration Court hearing because they fear that ICE will summarily detain and deport them.

¹⁵ See <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/02/24/2025-02970/partial-vacatur-of-2024-temporary-protected-status-decision-for-haiti>.

¹⁶ See <https://www.uscis.gov/alienregistration>.

¹⁷ See <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/ice-expands-detention-capacity-delaney-hall-facility-new-jersey>.

¹⁸ See <https://immpolicytracking.org/policies/reported-dhs-asks-irs-for-information-about-undocumented-immigrants/>.

¹⁹ See <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2025/02/01/us/politics/ice-arrests-trump-immigration.html>.

LAS calls upon City Council to meet this historical moment by doing whatever it can to protect non-citizens in New York City. Respectfully, the two most critical and immediate actions City Council should take are:

- Fight any attempt to bring ICE back to Rikers or to remove sanctuary city protections in New York City; and
- Increase funding support organizations fighting on behalf of non-citizens.

B. New York City Council Funding Requests – Immigration

We are grateful for the Council’s support for legal services for low-income immigrant New Yorkers, who are among the City’s most vulnerable populations. The Council’s commitment to ensuring parity of justice and access to comprehensive legal services for our immigrant communities is central to our work and establishes New York City’s approach as among the most progressive in the nation. Thanks to support from the New York City Council and the Human Resources Administration, LAS currently conducts the following immigration-related programs:

- 1) **The New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP)**, a collaboration between The Legal Aid Society, Brooklyn Defender Services, and The Bronx Defenders, has represented over 4,000 detained immigrants facing deportation since 2014, helping to ensure New York families are not separated simply because they cannot afford an attorney. The nation's first universal legal representation program for detained immigrants, NYIFUP provides high quality, holistic representation to New Yorkers detained and facing deportation who cannot afford an attorney. Our NYIFUP team manages a full caseload of deportation defense cases, and provide services including representation at master calendar, bond, and individual merits hearings before the Immigration Court, appeals in front of the Board of Immigration Appeals and federal circuit courts, and comprehensive social work services. Many of our NYIFUP clients are long-term permanent residents or other non-citizens with strong family ties and long work histories in this country.

As of February 23, 2025, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security detained over 43,759 non- citizens nationwide.²⁰ As has been the trend over the last few years, ICE has increasingly arrested New Yorkers in New York City and then detained them in facilities hundreds of miles away, including in Western Pennsylvania, at the Moshannon Valley Processing Center, Buffalo Service Processing Center in Upstate New York, Plymouth County Correctional Facility, in Burlington, Massachusetts, and detention facilities across the southern part of the United States. This practice of detaining NYC residents all over the country has made it more difficult for us to identify and provide representation to these NYC residents.

Since its inception and increasingly over the past several years, NYIFUP, this City Council, and other immigration advocates have held ICE accountable for egregious illegal detention trends of our neighbors, families, and friends. Most recently, we have called attention to needless and egregious suffering our clients endure at detention centers such as withheld medical care, racist behavior, violations of attorney client privileged mail and communications, and persistent access to counsel issues. The need for advocacy and legal representation on behalf of our fellow New Yorkers is more critical than ever as ICE continues to collaborate with local Department of Corrections officers to forcibly incarcerate New Yorkers and abduct them from our communities.

NYIFUP providers are the City's and statewide experts in defending these New Yorkers who are at imminent risk of being removed from the United States, and likely forever separated from their families here. We are best positioned to meet the challenge needed to help these vulnerable New Yorkers now. To that end, **The Legal Aid Society is respectfully requesting \$33,200,000 for NYIFUP in Fiscal Year 2026, split by the three NYIFUP providers, with an award of \$11,066,666 to LAS.**

²⁰ Syracuse University's Transactional Records Access Clearinghouse, <https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/quickfacts/> and https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/detentionstats/pop_agen_table.html.

- 2) **The Unaccompanied Minor Children and Families (UMFI) Initiative** has been providing legal assistance to Unaccompanied Children and Adults with Children fleeing endemic gang violence and domestic abuse since 2014, with the support of the New York City Council. Over the past 4 years, an average number of 137,379 unaccompanied children (UCs) entering the United States yearly,²¹ with some of these children finding themselves trapped into exploitative child labor situations, as the New York Times has repeatedly documented.²² Others are released to supportive sponsors, including many in New York City. This traumatized and vulnerable population is especially in need of highly competent legal representation to advance their claims for asylum, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), and other forms of immigration relief.

Over the past decade, but with a dramatic increase since spring 2022, the City has also seen an extraordinary influx of Adults with Children (AWC) families. Such cases involve multiple complex immigration legal matters, including expert evaluations, multiple relief applications that need to be submitted by different members of the same family unit, labor-intensive trials to prepare for, and particularly thorny ethical issues when clients' interests sometimes diverge. The demand for legal screenings and full representation of these AWC family units are ever increasing and LAS' work is desperately needed, as it is one of the few organizations with significant expertise in handling complex asylum, Special Immigrant Juvenile status, U and T nonimmigrant status, and deportation defense in Immigration Court removal proceedings. **The Legal Aid Society is respectfully requesting an enhancement to \$1,750,000 for UMFI in Fiscal Year 2026.** The requested budget increase will allow us to fully cover the cost of the staff dedicated to this project. LAS has not received an increase in UMFI funding since FY22.

²¹ U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Stats and Summaries (Nationwide Encounters), <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/stats/nationwide-encounters> (147,975 in FY21; 152,880 in FY22; 137,992 in FY23; 110,672 in FY24).

²² Hannah Dreier, "Labor Department Denounces Surge in Exploited Minor Children," New York Times (July 27, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/07/27/us/migrant-child-labor.html>; Hannah Dreier, "Alone and Exploited, Migrant Children Work Brutal Jobs Across the U.S.," New York Times (Feb. 25, 2023), <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/25/us/unaccompanied-migrant-child-workers-exploitation.html>.

- 3) **The Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI)** serves immigrants and new Americans who are seeking citizenship, permanent residence, or another immigration status or are seeking employment legal services after having been exploited by their employers. Legal services are provided through our Immigration Law Unit, Employment Law Unit, with support of 13 subcontracting agencies, including legal services providers and community-based organizations with deep ties to marginalized communities. In FY24, LAS and our subcontractors handled over 4,500 cases for individuals seeking assistance with an immigration, employment, or family law matter.

Currently, there is an active procurement for IOI entitled, “Office of Civil Justice – Immigration Opportunity Initiative and Low Wage Worker Legal Services (IOI/LWW)” in the Procurement and Sourcing Solutions Portal (“PASSPort”), with a deadline for responses until September 15, 2025. The solicitation is ill-timed and ill-prepared to address the quickly-changing legal environment. However, we remain hopeful that there will ultimately be a fair, robust, and comprehensive RFX process for the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative which prioritizes full legal representation services.

- 4) **The Low-Wage Worker Initiative (LWWI)** serves low-wage and unemployed workers who live or work in the City of New York. who are seeking enforcement of workers’ rights. The LWWI is the only dedicated City funding for workers’ rights, which allows LAS and its sister organizations to help raise up New Yorkers mired in poverty by seeking justice for victims of wage theft, discrimination, and other workplace abuse. Most of LAS’s cases involve violations of wage-and-hour laws, workplace discrimination, family and medical leave, labor trafficking, and claims for unemployment insurance. In its discrimination cases, ELU assists the most vulnerable New Yorkers who are sexually harassed, discriminated against based on race, national origin, immigration status, pregnancy, disability, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, status as a domestic violence victim, or criminal background, or who are denied reasonable accommodations needed due to pregnancy or disabilities. Low-wage jobs are disproportionately held by immigrants, women, young people, BIPOC, and

LGBTQ+ people. This work is particularly critical now given the federal government's attacks on LGBTQ+ and undocumented workers. LAS's work directly contributes to improving the health, safety, and stability of low-wage workers and their families. In FY24, LAS assisted individuals in over 550 employment cases under the LWWI. **The Legal Aid Society is asking for renewal of \$580,596 in this funding for Fiscal Year 2026.**

C. Our Work in Immigration Court

LAS continues to face multiple challenges before New York City Immigration Courts, each of which contributes to the increased amount of time and effort our staff must expend to provide zealous representation to our clients.

Our Immigration Court removal defense litigation has continued with a mix of in-person and WebEx appearances, both of which have been hampered by incredible inadequacies. It is not unusual for an Immigration Court judge to fail to rule on a pending motion for months on end, for the Immigration Court to not have a required interpreter available, or to cancel a final trial in Immigration Court within minutes of the hearing's start time, with no explanation or immediate rescheduling of the court hearing. These common occurrences cost our staff, clients, witnesses, and experts hundreds of lost hours and repeatedly deny our clients access to justice.

Despite some welcome efficiency with WebEx video conferencing for court hearings, including shorter Master Calendar hearings, it remains frustrating that New York City Immigration Courts defer to each individual Immigration Judge as to their personal preference to have parties appear in person or via WebEx. Further, each of the three New York City Immigration Courts has consistently refused to provide up-to-date information about and reliable means to communicate with court clerks or legal assistants. Further, in the last two weeks, Immigration Court websites removed all phone numbers and email addresses for court personnel, eliminating any means of communication between attorneys and the court clerks and judges and making it near impossible to obtain accurate information about upcoming hearings.

During the Biden Administration, there was a rise in of the government's exercise of prosecutorial

discretion. This was a positive development, as it not only helped clients who were deemed to be lower ICE enforcement priorities the opportunity to regularize or otherwise pursue immigration status in a non-adversarial process before U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services but also reduced the Immigration Court backlog for others waiting for their final trial. During the Biden Administration, ICE prosecutors in Immigration Court were often agreeing to dismiss cases or to exercise other forms of favorable discretion on a case-by-case basis. This all quickly disappeared on January 29, 2025 when Sirice Owen, Acting Director of the U.S. Department of Justice's Immigration Court system, rescinded Biden administration immigration enforcement priorities for removal and its accompanying guidance encouraging ICE prosecutors to exercise their discretion. As a result, ICE prosecutors are not able to exercise their own professional discretion to establish priorities in their handling of Immigration Court cases, forcing everyone to remain in backlogged Immigration Court proceedings for years with no resolution.

D. Our NYIFUP-Related Work

Providing immigration legal services to those who are detained by ICE is incredibly challenging for a variety of reasons, including that Immigration Court hearings are conducted at an extremely rapid pace, their cases often involve more complex legal analyses than those who are not detained by ICE, and their incarceration in and of itself is traumatizing and devastating for their families. However, two developments have made this work even more challenging: the detention of New Yorkers outside of the New York/New Jersey region which exacerbates communication and representation challenges and the increased detention of non-citizens under the current Trump administration.

For the most part, New Yorkers are no longer locally detained by ICE. ICE's New York City Field Office routinely arrests non-citizen New Yorkers in New York City and then detains them in facilities hundreds of miles away, including in the Orange County Correctional Facility in Goshen, New York, at the Moshannon Valley Processing Center in western Pennsylvania, at Buffalo Service Processing Center in upstate New York, at the Plymouth County Correctional Facility in Burlington, Massachusetts, and at detention facilities across the southern region of the United States. This practice of detaining NYC residents all over the country has made it more difficult for us to identify and provide representation to non-citizen New Yorkers.

Challenges in Identifying and Screening Non-Citizen New Yorkers for NYIFUP Immigration Legal Representation

When non-citizen New Yorkers were detained locally in the New York and New Jersey region, their Immigration Court proceedings were located locally as well, at the Varick Street Immigration Court in lower Manhattan. LAS and our other NYIFUP partners built professional working relationships with the Immigration Court and ICE prosecutors to allow NYIFUP staff to intake and screen unrepresented non-citizens during initial court hearings; this helped all stakeholders with creating more efficient and manageable dockets and helped NYIFUP identify non-citizen New Yorkers who needed Immigration Court representation.

Unfortunately, with the detention of non-citizen New Yorkers outside of the New York and New Jersey region, NYIFUP partners do not have the existing relationships with Immigration Court and ICE prosecutors in other jurisdictions, and there is no streamlined system to allow LAS or its NYIFUP partners to intake and screen non-citizen New Yorkers in other venues. Further, despite much effort by NYIFUP providers, these government stakeholders elsewhere have shown limited interest in collaborating to allow us to identify and potentially represent non-citizens on their dockets. After considerable advocacy and coalition-building with legal service provider near the Moshannon Valley Processing Center, NYIFUP providers receive referrals of individuals who might be eligible for our services. These organizations have extremely limited staffing and capacity though and we have often received referrals too late in the Immigration Court process and non-citizen New Yorkers often have already been ordered removed by the time we are able to contact them in detention.

As LAS and our NYIFUP partners have faced resistance when trying to gain access to intake and screen non-citizen New Yorkers in other non-New York City based Immigration Courts, LAS has developed creative strategies to help identify non-citizen New Yorkers in detention. In addition to receiving referrals directly from affected New York families and loved ones, LAS has recently started a court observation program with students at Fordham Law School to help us flag any unrepresented New York City residents being held at the Moshannon Valley Processing Center, as their Immigration Court proceedings are located at the Elizabeth, New Jersey Immigration Court. While these non-court based intake and screening systems appear fruitful, they involve considerable time and involvement for our staff.

Challenges in Advocating Against Unlawful Detentions of Non-Citizen New Yorkers Detained In Remote Locations

LAS faces significant obstacles litigating habeas petitions to challenge the unlawful detention of those detained in remote facilities, including the reality of little to no available *pro bono* counsel options locally to litigate near these immigration detention facilities and ICE's practice of transferring individuals without notice while habeas petitions are being prepared. As most federal courts have concluded that a habeas petition may only be filed in the district where an individual is confined, it may be difficult or impossible to obtain habeas counsel who is barred in the relevant district court and, even if habeas counsel is secured in a particular jurisdiction, there is no guarantee that such jurisdiction will be the proper venue for filing once the habeas is prepared.

LAS continues to explore and expand the ways in which we challenge ICE detention of non-citizen New Yorkers. LAS have begun challenging the adequacy and availability of bond proceedings for non-citizen New Yorkers who are transferred outside of the New York region by filing civil complaints under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) principles.²³ If a detained immigrant is challenging the adequacy of bond procedures in New York Immigration Court, then venue is proper in the Southern District of New York, given that most events will have transpired, and at least one government defendant is based, in that district. *See* 28 U.S.C. § 1391(e)(1) (permitting venue "in any judicial district in which (A) a defendant in the action resides [or] (b) a substantial part of the events or omissions giving rise to the claim occurred").

Increased Detention of Non-Citizens Under the Current Trump Administration

The second recent development that has made working in NYIFUP more challenging is the increased enforcement under the current Trump administration. Trump 2.0 campaigned with the promise of mass deportations and, since the election, has increased ICE arrests and deportations of non-citizens in

²³ Our Immigration Law Unit's federal litigation team has been at the forefront of immigration detention litigation for several years. With separate private foundation seed funding which has since expired, we have developed litigation materials on the properness of a civil complaint to challenge immigration detention proceedings. It provided technical assistance to a partner organization in *Valez-Chavez v. McHenry*, prepared a complaint and briefing for its own challenge in *L.M.U. v. King*, and obtained an amicus brief from the Constitutional Accountability Center in *L.M.U.* Our own case, *L.M.U.*, mooted out when ICE voluntarily released our client from custody ahead of the government's reply brief deadline. We recently commenced litigation on this issue in another case, *M.S.G. v. Neal*, Case No. 23-9859-JMF (SDNY), on behalf of a New Yorker who was detained by ICE and transferred between four different ICE facilities, undermining his ability to seek habeas relief. After filing a complaint and motion for a temporary restraining order, the government agreed to provide the relief sought: a new bond hearing in which ICE was required to demonstrate, by clear and convincing evidence, that M.S.G.'s continued detention was necessary.

this country. To further support these efforts, ICE has recently announced the imminent opening of the Delaney Hall Facility in Newark, New Jersey, with a bed space for 1,000 new detainees.²⁴ This will most likely lead to more ICE arrests of non-citizens in New York City region and, given NYIFUP's limited resources, will put incredible strain on our staff to meet the increased demand for immigration legal services for these non-citizen New Yorkers.

We also anticipate an increase in detention based on Congress's recent passage of the Laken Riley Act, which mandates the detention without bail of certain noncitizens arrested or charged with certain crimes.²⁵ These crimes include burglary, theft, larceny, shoplifting, assaulting a police officer, or crimes that result in death or serious bodily injury.²⁶ Given the dramatic shift in imposing mandatory ICE detention of non-citizens who may merely accused of low-level shoplifting or theft offenses, many more non-citizens are at risk of ICE detention than ever before. LAS anticipates that many non-citizen New Yorkers merely accused of low-level offenses will be detained both locally and nationwide, as part of this dragnet to advance Trump 2.0's mass deportation efforts.

Persistent Challenges Representing Non-Citizen New Yorkers in ICE Custody

Separate from these current trends of detaining non-citizen New Yorkers outside of the New York/New Jersey region and the increased detention of non-citizens under the current Trump administration, LAS continues to face persistent challenges in representing our NYIFUP clients generally. As we know from prior and current experience, detention jeopardizes access to counsel. As an example of this, we are constantly dealing with access to counsel issues at Orange County Correctional Facility (OCCF). The space in the OCCF that is set aside for in-person visits, sometimes referred to as the "glass house," is a room divided by a glass wall with a phone for communication. There is usually at least one correctional officer within earshot and frequently there are also other detained people meeting with their advocates. This makes it extremely difficult to have confidential conversations about past trauma, fear of gangs, or to dive into the personal details that an attorney must know to properly advise their clients and prepare them for trial. Some of the people we represent understandably refuse to meet with us in person given the confidentiality concerns. Although NYIFUP providers have repeatedly requested consistent

²⁴ <https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/ice-expands-detention-capacity-delaney-hall-facility-new-jersey>.

²⁵ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/5>.

²⁶ See *id.*

access to confidential meeting spaces with our clients at the facility, OCCF leadership and ICE have refused to allow for this.

Additionally, in-person visits at OCCF present language access issues when attorneys and clients do not speak a common language. The “glass house” telephones—the only mechanism by which an attorney and detained person may effectively communicate—make it nearly impossible for attorneys to communicate with their clients when they do not speak the same language. The only way to do so is to bring an interpreter in-person with the attorney; however, attorneys have often been restricted in bringing interpreters or other individuals with them on legal visits.

Our ability to adequately represent clients is significantly hampered by their detention. For years we have had issues communicating with clients behind bars, but these challenges have only been exacerbated by the recent increase in detention which has led to other serious disease outbreaks, such as the recent tuberculosis outbreak at OCCF which has resulted in quarantining an entire unit. Video conference services repeatedly fail, often with technical malfunctions where one party cannot hear the other, or the call fails to connect altogether. Efforts to correct these issues are sometimes resolved by individual officers, but often are not. Sometimes attorneys must wait days to be able to speak with their clients, even with pending trials looming on the horizon. Further, NYIFUP attorneys have at times had to prepare clients for their trial testimony using video technology where the audio portion was non-functional. Attorneys resorted to using dry-erase boards, or pieces of paper, to communicate messages to their clients visually and to prepare them for their final hearings which would determine whether they would be deported or permitted to remain in this country with loved ones.

Calls have varied, ranging from issues with OCCF’s video technology to a lack of staff available to facilitate the call. Officials at OCCF have consistently failed to respond to requests for assistance in restoring a reliable system of communication. ICE has at times allowed for 15-20 minute “legal phone calls,” which are appropriate to convey a brief message or a rescheduled court date at most, and woefully insufficient for people preparing testimony for their multi-hour trials, where a judge will determine whether or not they can remain in this country and ultimately their freedom. Developing the necessary attorney-client communication and trust is impossible by 15-20 minute calls.

Video calls are also extremely difficult to schedule. On any given day, there are only 14 timeslots longer than 25 minutes available for an entire housing unit which can house more than 40 people, and three of those time slots are after 7:00PM. Once a time slot is filled, it is no longer available for anyone in the unit to use. When considering the number of NYIFUP advocates, private attorneys, and other representatives attempting to schedule a call to clients at OCCF, this is clearly insufficient to meet the needs of the demand of representation.

As a result of the limitations on access to counsel, we often must communicate through calls made with new video tablets provided by OCCF. Tablets are often left uncharged or are taken away in retaliation for a perceived infraction or for speaking out against conditions of confinement. Sometimes clients are not informed that communicating with counsel through tablets is an option. Relying on tablets often jeopardizes confidentiality as the people we represent are forced to communicate with us in open spaces where other people are nearby, once again rendering our conversations non-confidential and hindering the free flow of often sensitive information that is necessary for us to provide effective legal representation.

OCCF, and other ICE detention facilities in New York State, have limited detained people's access to representation, making it less likely that they will be prepared for their trials, and thus more likely that they will be deported. Detention alone, particularly during the past few years, has become an access to counsel and due process issue by impeding detained people's ability to adequately prepare and gather evidence for their defense. NYIFUP is undermined by this.

E. Our Youth-Related Work

Since 2003, LAS's Youth Project has assisted undocumented non-citizen youth in New York City and surrounding counties who are in foster care, adoption, or guardianship, to obtain Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), allowing them to obtain green cards and other immigration benefits. The project also defends unaccompanied youth in removal proceedings.

LAS's Youth Project serves the legal needs of two vulnerable populations: (1) "undocumented immigrant youth," who are in foster care or in need of guardianship, custody, delinquency, or adoption arrangements, but who for the most part have not yet been detected by immigration authorities; and (2) "unaccompanied children" who have recently arrived in the United States without a parent, seeking to

escape endemic gang violence and/or extreme poverty in their home countries, and have been placed in removal proceedings after arrest and detention at the border. For the latter group, the lack of appointed counsel to help them navigate the complex immigration system and apply for immigration relief exacerbates their precarious situation.

LAS's Youth Project remains a leader amongst our fellow undocumented youth legal service providers. LAS leads the New York SIJS advocates' group, a bimonthly forum for immigrant youth legal service providers statewide to troubleshoot Family Court issues, discuss USCIS challenges, and brainstorm solutions to other developing legal issues. Approximately 40-50 advocates regularly attend the SIJS meetings, including officials from ACS.

The Youth Project also manages the SIJS-NY listserv, which includes hundreds of statewide legal service providers who can better represent their immigrant youth by maintaining contact with other experienced service providers. Members of the Youth Project speak regularly at continuing legal education (CLE) events, and several have spoken at national conferences, including the American Immigration Lawyers Association's Immigrant Defense Conference, National Association of Counsel for Children's annual conference, and the American Bar Association's Unaccompanied Child Conference. Youth Project staff are asked to consult on matters having national impact, including strategizing about and conducting impact litigation, drafting amicus briefs, and commenting on proposed changes to regulations.²⁷

Below, we highlight current trends and challenges facing LAS' Youth Project and its work on behalf of immigrant youth.

Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) Representation and Meeting the Immense Needs of New Yorkers

²⁷ LAS also sits on the steering committee of the End SIJS Backlog Coalition (www.sijsbacklog.com), a group of directly-impacted youth and over 150 allied advocate organizations across the country, working to educate Congress, relevant administrative agencies and the public about the harmful impacts of visa caps on vulnerable immigrant children, and to advocate for an end to the SIJS backlog. In 2023, the Coalition released a new report detailing the drastic increase in youth caught in the SIJS backlog over the last two years and highlights the first-hand stories of SIJS youth²⁷. The Coalition also released several Practice Advisories throughout 2023 and engaged in national policy and advocacy aimed at reducing the backlog and the impact of the backlog on SIJS youth through legislative, regulatory and policy changes.

With New York City’s existing immigrant population and those who have more recently arrived, there is a tremendous need immigration legal representation for immigrant youth eligible for SIJS and are approaching their 21st birthday when they will age-out of eligibility. Within LAS’ Youth Project alone, we taken on for representation of emergency SIJS cases every month, rushing to prepare clients, filings, and constantly pushing for Family Court hearing dates before our clients age-out. This is in addition to our work with existing clients and other new clients who are not in absolute last-minute crisis.

To additionally respond to this community need for SIJS assistance, in 2024, LAS launched a “pilot project” through the Immigrant Children Advocates’ Relief Effort (ICARE) coalition that has helped streamline the SIJS application process. Through this project, the Youth Project has assisted over two dozen youth with filing pro se guardianship applications in Queens Family Court, a necessary step towards obtaining SIJS. ICARE has filed over 70 petitions through the pilot project. The project helps alleviate the burden on immigration legal providers at a time where the system is overwhelmed with applications for SIJS while ensuring that youth have counsel each step of the process.

In February 2025, the Youth Project integrated its work through the SIJS pilot project with ILU’s weekly legal clinics, utilizing volunteer attorneys and law school students to help build capacity to help with preparing the family court petitions for SIJS cases.

The SIJS Backlog and Deferred Action

As previously reported, in March 2022, USCIS announced a new policy that when a SIJS application is approved, the applicant will now be considered for deferred action, making SIJS- approved youth eligible for work authorization as well as hopefully protecting them from removal²⁸. However, in December 2022, all countries experienced a “retrogression,” meaning that even SIJS petitioners from non-oversubscribed countries could no longer simultaneously petition for SIJS and adjustment of status, i.e., apply for their green cards. In April 2023, the worldwide retrogression increased even further when USCIS removed El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala from their own separate category and lumped all countries together.²⁹ While SIJS recipients from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador experienced an

²⁸ <https://www.uscis.gov/newsroom/alerts/uscis-to-offer-deferred-action-for-special-immigrant-juveniles>.

²⁹ End SIJS Backlog Practice Alert: April 2023 Visa Bulletin Changes, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5fe8d735a897d33f7e7054cd/t/649dda1174b3073767a4101e/1688066577565/2023_March-visa-bulletin-changes-alert.pdf.

advance of several months, the rest of the world retrogressed *by years* – to September 2018. As of March 1, 2025, the priority date is only at August 16, 2019.

In practice, this means that SIJS-based adjustments have slowed to a trickle. However, with a grant of deferred action, SIJS-approved youth are eligible for a work permit that is valid for four years. This is an extremely welcome development to SIJS-approved youth caught in the “backlog,” which includes over 100,000 young people throughout the US, with more than 20,000 in New York State alone³⁰. Because the advent of deferred action for approved SIJS recipients was a simple change in policy, advocates fear that deferred action and its attendant work authorization will be easy to undo. With the current Trump Administration, we anticipate the elimination of SIJ Deferred Action and allowance of temporary work authorizations for Special Immigrant Juveniles while they await permission to apply for lawful permanent residency. Youth Project leaders, along with other leaders of legal services organizations throughout the U.S., have begun meeting about challenging any possible rescission of this immensely helpful policy.

LAS continues to monitor immigration law developments to assess how this impacts non-citizen youth, and LAS will continue to represent our clients in their quest for safety and permanency in this country. We will also continue to provide expert technical assistance to other practitioners in New York City, statewide, and nationally regarding best practices and arguments for all types of cases relating to immigrant youth.

F. Our Federal Work

Our Immigration Law Unit’s federal litigation team continues to be a leader in impact litigation to obtain protection for broad classes of non-citizens and achieves class action victories that protect thousands of non-citizens from arbitrary and cruel immigration policies. We also undertake litigation for individuals in federal district court and in the circuit courts of appeals to address systemic injustices in our immigration system. We craft innovative legal strategies, secure wins for our individual clients, and establish favorable precedents on emerging legal issues. We amplify our impact by facilitating partnerships and working groups, and we provide technical support to practitioners in New York and across the country.

³⁰ End SIJS Backlog Coalition, “False Hopes: over 100,000 Immigrant Youth Trapped in the SIJS Backlog,” <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5fe8d735a897d33f7e7054cd/t/656a48a3f02597441a4cbf95/1701464285675/2023-false-hopes-report.pdf>.

Challenging cruel, unconstitutional, and arbitrary immigration policies under the Administrative Procedure Act and the Due Process Clause

During the Trump Administration, LAS was at the forefront of challenging unlawful immigration policies. In *Make the Road et al. v. Cuccinelli*³¹ and *Make the Road et al. v. Pompeo*³², LAS, the Center for Constitutional Rights, and Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP, as well as the National Immigration Law Center on the *Pompeo* case, led litigation and advocacy to stop the public charge rules issued by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the U.S. Department of State (DOS), which threatened to penalize noncitizens for accessing vital benefit programs. In *Doe et al. v. Cuccinelli*, LAS partnered with Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP to bring a lawsuit on behalf of a noncitizen domestic violence survivor and several organizations to challenge the legality of Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) practice of making civil immigration arrests without a judicial warrant or court order in and around New York State courthouses. We stand prepared to fight for immigrants' rights once more on these issues and others, as the new Trump Administration reverts to its prior regressive policies and enacts new, devastating anti-immigrant measures.

Challenging unlawful detention

An unfortunate reality we face is that the U.S. Supreme Court is increasingly hostile to immigrants' rights. The Supreme Court has limited immigrants' access to the courts through traditional impact litigation vehicles, including class actions to challenge unlawful detention and deportation practices. The Supreme Court also has rejected statutory arguments that previously yielded uniform safeguards against arbitrary detention. As a result, individual habeas petitions that squarely address the constitutional limits of ICE's detention power are the primary check on ICE's arbitrary detention practices.

In *Velasco Lopez v. Decker*³³, LAS challenged the prolonged immigration detention of Mr. Velasco Lopez, a young man and former Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient, who entered the United States at the age of six. We prevailed with a landmark decision, in which the Second Circuit held that when the government seeks to detain a noncitizen under 8 U.S.C. § 1226(a) for a

³¹ Case 1:19-cv-07993-GBD (S.D.N.Y.).

³² Case 1:19-cv-11633-GBD (S.D.N.Y.).

³³ *Velasco Lopez v. Decker*, 978 F.3d 842 (2d Cir. 2020).

prolonged period of time, the government must justify such detention by clear and convincing evidence. This case has significant implications for our ability to secure the release of other noncitizen clients held in detention, which had been constrained by agency policies improperly requiring noncitizens to bear the burden in bond hearings. Our decision was cited extensively by the First Circuit in *Hernandez-Lara v. Lyons*³⁴, in which that court followed suit.

We have been at the forefront of litigation to enforce compliance with *Velasco Lopez*. ICE has urged courts to construe *Velasco Lopez* narrowly, thereby depriving detained individuals of essential due process guarantees. Through individual habeas actions, we have secured favorable district court decisions rejecting ICE’s interpretations. For example, in *J.C.G. v. Genalo*³⁵, ICE detained a New York City resident and asylum-seeker for nine months based on a single dismissed criminal case that arose from an interpretation error. While J.C.G. was detained, his partner struggled to make ends meet and support their three school-age children, the youngest of whom started kindergarten at a New York City public school this fall. ICE refused to provide our client, J.C.G., with a constitutionally adequate bond hearing, and argued that J.C.G. was required to undertake a time-consuming administrative appeal before vindicating his constitutional rights. We secured a habeas victory for J.C.G., in which a district court affirmed the core tenet that “[f]reedom from imprisonment — from government custody, detention, or other forms of physical restraint — lies at the heart of the liberty that [the Constitution’s Due Process Clause] protects” and rejected the government’s assertion that J.C.G. must exhaust his claims through a futile administrative appeal process.³⁶ The district court ordered that the government provide J.C.G. an adequate bond hearing, and at that hearing, and immigration judge ordered J.C.G. released on conditions and a minimal bond. J.C.G. was able to return to his family earlier this year.

Building on our work on securing fair bond hearings, we successfully litigated a challenge to prolonged, mandatory detention in *Keisy G.M. v. Decker*, which the Second Circuit decided last year in tandem with another case, *Black v. Decker*³⁷. Keisy G.M., a current NYIFUP client, is a longtime permanent resident from the Bronx who cared for his mother and young children, and who was an essential

³⁴ *Hernandez-Lara v. Lyons*, 10 F.4th 19 (1st Cir. 2021).

³⁵ *J.C.G. v. Genalo*, No. 24-cv-8755, 2025 WL 88831 (S.D.N.Y. Jan. 14, 2025). LAS has obtained similar district court decisions rejecting ICE’s expansive interpretation of administrative exhaustion in *O.F.C. v. Decker*, No. 22-cv-2255-JPC, 2022 WL 4448728 (S.D.N.Y. Sept. 12, 2022), and *B.S. v. Joyce*, No. 29-cv-9738-PKC, 2023 WL 1962808 (S.D.N.Y. Feb. 13, 2023).

³⁶ *J.C.G.*, 2025 WL 88831, at *7.

³⁷ 103 F.4th 133 (2d Cir. 2024).

worker for a medical linens supplier during the pandemic. ICE detained Keisy G.M. without notice early one morning in 2020 and locked him up in county jails for over a year and a half. The government refused to provide him a simple bond hearing, even though ICE eventually conceded that he is not dangerous and does not present a risk of flight. The Second Circuit decided in favor of Keisy G.M., holding that the government cannot detain noncitizens under 8 U.S.C. § 1226(c) for an unreasonably prolonged period of time without a bond hearing, where ICE must justify detention by clear and convincing evidence and where the judge considers the noncitizen's ability to pay and alternatives to detention. The government has petitioned the Second Circuit for a rehearing en banc. If the court grants rehearing, we will continue to litigate this case on behalf of Keisy G.M.

Under the new Administration, we have also seen an uptick in the number of noncitizen New Yorkers who are re-detained by ICE at their check-in appointments. We have developed sample litigation materials, including a habeas petition and a motion for a temporary restraining order, that advocates may consider filing in federal district court to prevent their clients' redetention.

➤ ***Securing access to the courts in an age of immigration transfers***

As previously noted, ICE routinely transfers immigrant New Yorkers to local jails in the southeastern United States and federal detention centers in Western Pennsylvania and the Buffalo region of upstate New York. Given the Trump Administration's efforts to detain more noncitizens and open new detention centers, we have already seen a higher rate of clients being transferred to facilities out of state, including as far as Washington state. These detained noncitizens are hundreds of miles from their communities, their counsel, and the courts. All of the challenges of litigating one's immigration case from detention are intensified by this distance. A host of new challenges arise as detainees in these remote jurisdictions face less favorable courts and caselaw.

An emerging challenge during this era of transfers is how to ensure that detained immigrants have access to non-immigration state court proceedings, such as pending criminal cases, family court proceedings, and other matters. LAS has developed litigation materials challenging ICE's failure to produce detained noncitizens for their court proceedings, including a sample petition for writ of habeas *ad testificandum* in federal district court. We have shared these materials with other advocates and continue to provide technical assistance on the issue. As ICE has ramped up its practice of transferring New Yorkers across the country without notice, LAS has been a leader in ensuring that detained individuals retain the

ability to seek review of their removal orders in the appropriate courts of appeals. LAS served as lead counsel in two Second Circuit petitions, filed by New Yorkers, in which the U.S. Attorney General sought to change venue to other circuit courts based on ICE's unilateral transfers of those individuals. We developed and shared briefs opposing such transfers, and we prevented improper changes of venue in both of our cases. We also co-authored two amicus briefs that detailed the ways in which the government's position on venue undermined fairness and was unworkable.

LAS has also been at the forefront of transparency efforts to compel ICE to provide information related to ICE's transfer of detained New Yorkers to remote detention facilities. Through a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request filed with ICE, LAS sought and obtained data on transfers of individuals from the New York area, analyzed the data, and presented it to other advocates, in order to shed light on the scope of this practice and help inform our work on behalf of detained individuals. We also filed a lawsuit in federal district court, *The Legal Aid Society v. U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement*³⁸, to obtain information on ICE's policies and practices related to transfers and obtained information through that lawsuit.

➤ ***Challenging unjust removal***

We also regularly undertake litigation challenging the government's increasingly over-broad interpretations of deportation statutes. In recent years, we have litigated several cases where immigration officials have classified minor criminal convictions as deportable offenses and have secured stipulated remands to the agency for further adjudication. For example, in *E.M.O. v. Garland*³⁹, we filed a petition for review challenging the agency's denial of asylum benefits based on cognitive disability, and secured a stipulated remand to the Board of Immigration Appeals to consider the case.

Our Second Circuit docket also includes several cases seeking to ensure that individuals who face torture in their home countries are not unfairly denied protection under the Convention Against Torture. In *M.A. v. Garland*⁴⁰, we prevailed before the Second Circuit, which agreed that the immigration judge and Board of Immigration Appeals had erred in its analysis of our client's torture claim. In partnership

³⁸ Case No. 24-cv-2344 (S.D.N.Y.).

³⁹ Case No. 21-6108 (2d Cir.) (motion for abbreviation of name filed).

⁴⁰ Case No. 19-728, 2021 WL 2878926 (2d Cir. July 9, 2021).

with Skadden Arps and several legal services organizations, we submitted an amicus brief in *Garcia-Aranda v. Garland*⁴¹, and identified a host of recurring errors in the Board of Immigration Appeals’ analysis of torture claims. The Second Circuit issued an important, precedential decision in *Garcia-Aranda*, clarifying that the agency had been construing Convention Against Torture requirements too narrowly. In *B.E.A. v. Garland*⁴², we challenged the unlawful removal order of a young man who had been persecuted and tortured by both gangs and police officers in El Salvador; soon after we filed our opening brief in August of 2024, we were able to secure a favorable remand so that the agency could reconsider the violence and harm that our client had experienced as a child. LAS also litigated *B.G.S. v. Garland*⁴³, with pro bono co-counsel at Debevoise & Plimpton LLP, to challenge the agency’s failure to meaningfully consider credible testimony from our client, his family members, and an expert witness that he will likely be tortured by gangs in Guatemala with the acquiescence of government officials. The Second Circuit heard oral argument in this case in October 2024 and a decision is pending.

LAS has also been on the forefront of efforts to ensure that individuals seeking protection from persecution and torture have access to the federal courts of appeals, even if they were previously ordered removed and have been placed in “withholding-only” proceedings. We have led and contributed to amicus briefing in the Second and Fourth Circuits on this issue and have developed model briefing to advocate for judicial review in individual cases. The U.S. Supreme Court is considering this issue and will hear oral argument later this month in a related case, *Riley v. Bondi*,⁴⁴ to resolve conflicting decisions between the federal courts of appeals.

We believe that our impact is greatest when we work in partnership with others. LAS co-facilitates the Second Circuit working group, which focuses on removal defense issues in the Second Circuit, and the New York-New Jersey-Pennsylvania habeas working group, which explores creative litigation to fight immigration detention. Each of these working groups operates a lively listserv and, on a quarterly basis, convenes practitioners from dozens of organizations and law firms litigating federal immigration cases in federal district court and the courts of appeals. Through these working groups, we touch the immigration and federal court cases of thousands of noncitizens who are not LAS clients.

⁴¹ 53 F.4th 752 (2d Cir. 2022).

⁴² Case Nos. 20-1752 & 24-1081 (2d Cir.).

⁴³ Case No. 23-6862 (2d Cir.).

⁴⁴ No. 23-1270 (S.Ct., argument scheduled Mar. 24, 2025).

In addition, in June of 2024, LAS organized a convening of over 40 immigration advocates to collaborate on challenges to detention under Section 235(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which authorizes no-bond detention for many recently arrived asylum-seekers. And in January 2025, our federal team presented free legal trainings on challenges to unlawful detention and petitions for review of removal orders in federal court. Hundreds of advocates attended these trainings.

G. Our Immigration Opportunities Initiative-related Work

The primary aim of the City's Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI) funding has been to ensure that more non-citizens would have access to full legal representation, including in complex immigration matters and removal proceedings. Through our IOI work, LAS has helped thousands of non-citizen New Yorkers obtain and/or secure their immigration status, avoid deportation, and fight back against unfair labor practices and exploitation. In FY24, LAS and our subcontractors handled over 4,500 cases for individuals seeking assistance with an immigration, employment, or family law matter. This work strengthens the social fabric of our city and benefits all New Yorkers, and LAS is committed to continuing its leadership in this area.

H. Conclusion

We thank the City Council for its generous support of immigration legal services, which allow us to serve some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers.

Respectfully submitted,



Deborah Lee
Attorney-in-Charge
Immigration Law Unit
The Legal Aid Society



Free to
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NYC Council Committee on Immigration
Preliminary Budget Hearing
Public Testimony
March 6, 2025

To The New York City Council Committee on Immigration:

Good morning. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak with you today. On behalf of the Free to Be Youth Project of the Urban Justice Center, I would like to thank the New York City Council's Committee on Immigration for convening this necessary hearing. My name is Amy Leipziger, and I am the Project Director of the Free to Be Youth Project.

Free to Be Youth Project

The Free to Be Youth Project (FYP) is a direct legal service provider dedicated to serving homeless and at-risk lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) youth. The Project is housed at the Urban Justice Center, a non-profit law collective serving New York City's most disenfranchised poverty populations. Since 1994, we have been providing legal services to LGBTQ+ youth and young adults who are low-income, living on the streets, and homeless shelters, in the juvenile justice system, or foster care. We regularly travel to the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) drop-in centers, including the Ali Forney Center, Safe Horizon's Streetwork Project and Covenant House and offer direct legal services and know-your-rights workshops. We also conduct legal clinics at the LGBT Center, HMI, and the Pride Center of Staten Island. We have helped hundreds of LGBTQ+ youth with legal problems like applying for legal immigration status, fighting wrongful denials of disability benefits, changing their names, fighting terminations of their public assistance benefits, and overcoming barriers to obtaining safe and stable housing.

In the last several years, we have seen, and responded to, an unprecedented and increased demand for legal services from recently arrived LGBTQ+ youth in New York—especially arriving from Latin America and the Caribbean. Many newly arrived LGBTQ+ youth face the possibility of deportation to countries that respond to their sexual orientation, gender identity, and lived experiences as sex workers or trafficking survivors with hostility and life-threatening persecution—one that often amounts to death sentences. FYP has been at the forefront of providing services to this uniquely vulnerable population of newly arrived New Yorkers.

However, the challenges these youth face have only worsened in recent months. Mayor Eric Adams has called for a rollback of sanctuary protections for migrants accused of crimes ^[1], and Governor Kathy Hochul has announced that there will be no additional funding to support New York City's migrant crisis ^[2]. Additionally, the recent closure of the Roosevelt Hotel Asylum Seeker Arrival Center—a vital hub that provided legal aid, medical care, and emergency

Free to Be Youth Project

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housing—has left thousands of asylum-seekers without critical resources^[3]. These policy shifts have created uncertainty in the administration's support for migrants and asylum seekers, which is much needed during a time of unprecedented attacks from the Trump administration.

We are here to speak today on behalf of the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026, the Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2026-2029, and the Fiscal 2025 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report. We ask that the City Council fund immigration legal service providers to perform community outreach, present know-your-rights presentations, conduct legal screenings, and handle both straightforward and complex cases.

Restoring Funding in the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026

The New York City Council has demonstrated its leadership and support for immigrants through funding to various immigrant services. However, the Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Budget presents significant concerns regarding the future of critical immigrant and community support programs. Several essential initiatives—including the Asylum Seeker Legal Assistance Network (ASLAN), Asylum Seeker Resource Navigation Centers, the Office of Asylum Seekers Operations (OASO), and DYCD Adult Literacy programs—are not funded beyond Fiscal 2025. Collectively, these programs represented over \$25 million in funding last year, yet they have been entirely removed from the upcoming budget.

Additionally, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) programs have seen a \$7.1 million reduction compared to Fiscal 2025, impacting vital services such as the English Learning & Support Centers and the Immigration Legal Support Hotline. The elimination and reduction of these programs will have a direct and devastating effect on immigrant New Yorkers, including LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and other vulnerable communities who rely on these resources for legal representation, language access, and critical support services.

The Human Cost of Defunding Immigrant Services

Without dedicated funding for asylum legal services and immigrant support programs, vulnerable individuals will face immense obstacles in navigating the immigration system. Tomas Doe* is a 17-year-old unaccompanied child from Nicaragua. When he arrived in the United States, Tomas faced significant hurdles including unstable housing and a lack of English proficiency. When attempting to file his asylum application, he made a minor typographical error which put him at risk of missing his asylum interview and jeopardized his application. FYP helped Tomas obtain documentation which allowed his application to move forward and ensure he received access to the additional protections designated for minors seeking asylum.

Sarah V* was a 17-year-old unaccompanied child from Venezuela. When she arrived in the United States, having lost her mother during the perilous journey, she faced hostility and derision from immigration officers who challenged her credibility. Her struggles were compounded by

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bureaucratic snafus when she sought shelter in the city. Taken together, her first year in the states was met with repeated hurdles that compounded the loss of her family, and her ability to create a meaningful support system. FYP helped her navigate the immigration process and has worked to ensure that she can continue to access education, and economic support.

Amid the federal government threatening to suspend legal aid for unaccompanied minors^[4], we now face the threat of the City cutting direct funding that will pose significant challenges for the clients we work for. To effectively support and protect these vulnerable populations, it is critical to connect immigrants with adequate legal resources and services that provide language support and cultural competency. These services not only ensure that immigrants have access to crucial legal protections and pathways to residency or asylum but also help them navigate complex immigration systems with guidance and support.

Similarly, Nikolai S* and Alexei V* are a same-sex couple who fled Russia due to persecution, seeking safety through Georgia and Mexico before arriving in the U.S. Expecting to stay together after marrying in Mexico, they were instead separated in immigration detention, where they endured homophobic abuse. While Alexei fought his asylum case from detention, Nikolai sought release, complicating their legal process. Once reunited in New York, they faced housing instability and lacked work authorization. FYP helped secure their work permits and file an I-730 petition, which allows asylees or refugees to bring their spouse or unmarried children under 21 to the U.S. for family reunification. Now, with efforts underway to terminate Nikolai's removal proceedings, the couple can finally rebuild their lives in safety as recognized asylees.

These stories are not isolated, or unique. While our clients have been fortunate enough to obtain our services, there are thousands of immigrants in the city that don't have access to these essential resources. Unhoused queer youth frequently experience separation from social services and encounter discrimination or harassment from providers, making access to these services even more essential. Our capacity is limited, as are the capacities of our partner organizations, and more support is needed. The elimination of ASLAN, Navigation Centers, and OASO—along with the reduction in funding for MOIA's English Learning & Support Centers and the Immigration Legal Support Hotline—will exacerbate lack of legal resources for immigrants, increase case backlogs, and create instability for those most in need. We cannot be everywhere at once, and the needs of the community will soon outpace our abilities. Without increased and adequate support services, immigrant, and LGBTQ+ youth will continue to fall through the cracks in our system, struggling to access the resources they need to become successful contributors to the New York City community.

New York City must continue to protect the rights of its immigrant residents by restoring and expanding funding for these programs, rather than scaling them back. The Free to Be Youth Project calls on the Council to prioritize restoring funding for ASLAN, Navigation Centers,



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OASO, and DYCD Adult Literacy programs. Additionally, we ask to reverse cuts to MOIA's English Learning & Support Centers and Immigration Legal Support Hotline and increase investment in Immigrant Rights Workshops and other DYCD-funded immigrant services, which remain flat-funded despite growing demand from the community, and those organizations that serve the community.

Thank you to the members of this Committee and to the community of youth advocates who have been working hard to address the needs of this community. The Free to Be Youth Project stands ready to assist the NYC Council Committees on Immigration in any way that we can.

**Pseudonyms have been used to protect clients' privacy and safety.*

References

[1] CBS News. "Mayor Eric Adams Pushes for Changes to NYC's Sanctuary City Laws." *CBS News*, January 26, 2024. <https://www.cbsnews.com/newyork/news/new-york-city-sanctuary-city-laws-eric-adams/>.

[2] Gronewold, Anna. "Hochul to Adams: No New Funding for NYC's Migrant Crisis." *Politico*, February 10, 2025. <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/02/10/hochul-adams-new-york-city-migrant-funding-00203255>.

[3] Office of the Mayor, New York City. "Mayor Adams Announces Forthcoming Closure of Roosevelt Hotel Asylum Seeker Humanitarian Relief and Intake Center." *NYC Mayor's Office*, February 2, 2025. <https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/101-25/mayor-adams-forthcoming-closure-roosevelt-hotel-asylum-seeker-humanitarian-relief-and>.

[4] NBC News. "Trump Administration Moves to End Legal Aid for Unaccompanied Migrant Children." *NBC News*, April 25, 2023. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/trump-administration-legal-aid-unaccompanied-migrant-children-rcna193230>.



**NYC Council Committee on Immigration
FY 26 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Thursday, March 6, 2025**

Testimony Submitted by the Committee for Hispanic Children & Families (CHCF)

Thank you Chair Avilés and the Committee on Immigration for the opportunity to offer testimony on FY 26 budgetary support for NYC's immigrant population. The Committee for Hispanic Children & Families, better known by its acronym, CHCF, is a non-profit organization with an over 40-year history of combining education, capacity-building, and advocacy to strengthen the support system and continuum of learning for children and youth from birth through school-age. While our primary focus and direct services are around access to high quality, culturally responsive and sustaining early learning and school-aged education, we understand that many intersectional circumstances and experiences within the community impact the well-being of children and their family support structures; as such we deliver holistically responsive services within the schools, early care and learning programs, and wider communities we serve across NYC.

CHCF's Community Empowerment and Social Services teams collaborate to support resource access and city system navigation for immigrant families and individuals. Our Social Services Department works in contract with HousingWorks and the Department of Homeless Services to oversee service delivery at a Long Island City hotel that houses over 183 adults and 148 minors, 102 families in total. Residents of the hotel represent 8 countries of origin and 5 languages. Our team delivers culturally and linguistically responsive, trauma-informed support to families in navigating resource access and establishing long-term stability in the city.

Our Community Empowerment team not only works alongside our LIC Social Services team but works to extend CHCF's impact beyond the confines of all contracts to ensure individuals and families receive the comprehensive, wrap around care and resource access that they require to establish and maintain security and stability. The CE team collaborates with our Youth Development school-based partnerships, as well as our Family Child Care Network and our Early Care and Education teams in leveraging resources to and through our network of predominantly Spanish-speaking childcare providers and the families served in those programs.

We first wish to thank you, Chair Avilés, and the members of this committee for your unwavering commitment to supporting immigrant families and individuals throughout New York City, particularly at a time when varying levels of government are attempting to instill fear upon these communities. CHCF can attest to the harm that the current political climate is causing throughout immigrant communities, as families are afraid to take their children to school, to engage in the workforce, or simply to go to the grocery store due to an ever-present worry of immigration enforcement agents apprehending them and potentially separating their family. Community-based organizations, such as CHCF, have increased their





efforts to communicate safety protocols and personal rights, as well as communicating facts about policy changes when there is so much intentional miscommunication and threat flooding through information sources; and particularly as there has been a noticeable decrease in communication to disrupt chill-effect from the current city administration.

The de-prioritization of immigrant support is clear in the minimal and shrinking resources put forward in the executive budget proposal. We share the concern that the current proposed funding is only \$782,000, to fund just 5 positions in the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. New York City remains a city of immigrants, with roughly 38% of the city's population being foreign born.¹ As of 2024, approximately 62% of NYC's children live in a household with at least one foreign-born family member.² This is humanitarian matter – a matter of safeguarding children and family units; of ensuring equitable, unhindered access to services and resources that these families and individuals have a right to; a matter of standing strong for *all* New Yorkers. As was pointed out by this committee, we still have a legal obligation to uphold the sanctuary laws of the city; but we also have a moral obligation to stand up against attacks on such a significant portion of our city. The immigrant communities of New York are rooted in the very definition of who we are, and we cannot look away when true harm and injustice is being perpetrated against them in broad strokes.

As you have consistently said, Chair Avilés, this is a matter of budget inequity. New York City can and *must* do better to ensure an equitable level of resources are being directed to meet the needs of immigrant New Yorkers and their families. As of 2024, NYC's immigrants comprised 43% of the city's labor force (compared to 18% of the nation's workforce)³ contributing \$23.7 billion in state and local taxes and \$45.5 billion in federal taxes. Undocumented immigrants in NYC alone, contributed \$96.7 billion in federal, state, and local taxes in 2022, with \$37.3 billion going to the state and city of New York.⁴ Immigrants continue to give, to contribute to this city in so many wonderful ways – beyond economically – and the alarming reality is that the city's administration continues to deny reciprocity of that care.

¹ American Community Survey 2025 1-year estimate NYC Foreign Born Population. Retrieved from: <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSDT1Y2023.B05006?q=New+York+city,+New+York&t=Native+and+Foreign-Born:Place+of+Birth>

² Investment to Protect Immigrant Families in NYC in 2025 (Jan. 16, 2025). Citizens' Committee for Children of New York. Retrieved from: <https://cccnewyork.org/data-publications/investment-to-protect-immigrant-families-in-nyc-for-2025/>

³ Facts, Not Fear: How Welcoming Immigrants Benefits New York City (Jan 4, 2024). New York City Comptroller Brad Lander. Retrieved from: <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/facts-not-fear-how-welcoming-immigrants-benefits-new-york-city/#:~:text=New%20immigration%20helps%20the%20U.S.,than%20they%20take.%5B23%5D>

⁴ Tax Payments by Undocumented Immigrants (Jul 30, 2024). Institute of Taxation and Economic Policy. Retrieved from: <https://itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-taxes-2024/>





We would like to speak to a few of the specific challenges that we are experiencing in our work with individuals and families, which we call on the city to ensure appropriate funding allocations and more strategic coordination between city agencies to address.

Of continuing concern is the impact of the city's 60-day limit to housing for asylum-seeking families. Even with any deferral of relocation for families with school-aged children, families have to go through the initial reassignment before they can request to remain at the same housing placement while their child(ren) are enrolled in school. The additional stressor of knowing their housing is never truly stable inflicts unnecessary strain on families. Families carry with them the trauma of what they left behind in their home countries, the journey to the border, and subsequent treatment at the border and transition to NYC – a city whose administration has consistently disparaged their presence over the past 3 years. As the federal political climate has shifted in recent months, toxic stress is compounding on families who want nothing more than to establish safe and stable lives for their children. Our team continues to report barriers in timely access to multiple systems and services for families. In trying to respond to the unique needs of each individual and family residing in the hotel, our team faces a mixture of antiquated paper form processes and unintegrated and often glitchy online forms and systems, requiring significant time with each family to go through, interpret, and complete the necessary forms; additionally, city agency support is largely under capacity, as front line community support staffing positions experience hiring freezes, high turnover, and department position erasure.

Families continue to identify consistent childcare for their children who are not school-aged (under 3) or for out of school time, particularly as they are trying to find work, traveling to appointments, and handling other responsibilities as a parent. Promise NYC has been tremendously impactful and has been lauded for its impact and responsiveness to the moment, as advocates call on the state to make similar supports available to immigrant families statewide who meet eligibility requirements but are ineligible for federally funded child care subsidy based on status. We ask that the city maintain baselined Promise NYC funds and work with organizations tasked with enrolling families, and community-based partners in immigrant-populated communities and shelters to assess the existing and growing need and increase funding to meet that actual need. We must do better to ensure *all* children have access to safe, high-quality childcare while their parents work towards establishing long-term stability.

We continue to experience the impact of insufficient funding to make legal services available to meet the demand citywide. The city has pulled back its investments yet continues to connect individuals reaching out for help to organizations that have historically provided the work, continuously and intentionally putting off the burden of cost and struggle to meet the demand on overwhelmed community-based organizations. CHCF continues to have individuals reach out to request legal aid services, having been told that our organization provided it, even though we have not held a direct contract with the city to provide immigration legal services for about a decade. Our staff then takes on the responsibility of trying to find organizations who are taking on clients for those that the city refers to us. We are all aware that it is very difficult for organizations who deliver these services to meet the need and they frequently have to deny services that they do not have the capacity to provide, given





insufficient funding. Our team continues to communicate with those we have worked with in past only to be consistently told they don't have capacity.

Beyond the pressing need for pursuing status or status adjustment inside of the current climate to reduce risk of deportation and family separation, it is extremely difficult for mixed-status, undocumented, or asylum-seeking immigrant families to navigate a system that is complicated without legal support, and ultimately the systematic underfunding of these services does not set struggling families up for success. We join the many other organizations and advocates in calling on increased funding for organizations providing immigrant legal services, to increase their capacity to better meet the need.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to present a testimony; and if there are any questions about our work or what is presented in our testimony, please reach out to Danielle Demeuse, Director of Policy, at: ddemeuse@chcfinc.org or 212-206-1090 ext. 359.



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**Fiscal Year 2026 Discretionary Budget Request Testimony to the
NYC Council Committee on Immigration Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 7th, 2025**

Good afternoon. My name is Maryam Mohammed-Miller, and I am the Director of Government Relations at Planned Parenthood of Greater New York (PPGNY). I would like to thank the Chair of the Committee on Immigration, Council Member Aviles, and all the committee members for the opportunity to discuss PPGNY's programs, services, and fiscal year 2026 funding requests. I would also like to thank the Chair of the Finance Committee, Council Member Brannan, and Speaker Adrienne Adams for your continued support of PPGNY's work to provide health care to all New Yorkers in need.

PPGNY is proud of the services we offer throughout New York City, and especially proud of the engagement we have with immigrant communities. We are, however, aware of the battle we see on the horizon. In the two months that the Trump-Vance administration has been in office, we have already seen devastating impact their policies have had on immigrant communities throughout the country. The administration's harmful executive orders that increased ICE enforcement have instilled fear in immigrant communities, leaving many hesitant to access resources they depend on. We also anticipate continued attacks including reinstating public charge rules, that will deter immigrant communities from utilizing public benefit programs. Additionally, the administration may again force providers out of the Title X program, one of the only federally funded programs for sexual and reproductive health that supports access for marginalized communities, including immigrants, regardless of their status. Despite these attacks, we stand ready to provide care for all in need of our services.

As background, PPGNY is a trusted provider of sexual and reproductive health care and education programs for communities throughout New York City. In 2024, we conducted over 74,000 patient visits through our virtual health center and at our NYC health centers, providing care to all regardless of immigration status, identity, or ability to pay for services. We engaged over 21,000 individuals through our education and community engagement programs--including over 2,600 young people. Our Project Street Beat program (PSB), through their offices and Mobile Health Center, conducted 270 patient visits with individuals at high risk of HIV exposure. And in 2024, we helped enroll over 4,300 individuals in health insurance programs.

At PPGNY, we are deeply committed to providing care, no matter what. Over the years, we have weathered the many attempts to severely restrict sexual and reproductive health care, including abortion care. This includes anti-abortion groups' weaponization of the federal court system to ban access to medication abortion care and launch a baseless suit aimed at defunding Planned

Parenthood. We've also experienced the effects of harmful policies from anti-abortion state governments aimed at criminalizing providers in NY offering abortion care. Additionally, hostile elected representatives throughout the country continue to vigorously attack the transgender and gender non-conforming communities and the lifesaving care they depend on. These attacks follow the United States Supreme Court (SCOTUS) decision that overturned *Roe v. Wade*, ending the 50-year-old precedent that constitutionally protected abortion in our country. We expect the attacks to continue under the second Trump term; he and his administration have signaled their desire to defund our operations.

Nonetheless, PPGNY stands ready to respond to moments of crisis. We stand as a proud provider for those who may have experienced restrictions in their home state and continue to offer lifesaving care, no matter what, to New York City residents. We also recently launched our virtual health center so New Yorkers can access care they trust from wherever they are most comfortable.

Protecting and Expanding Access to Immigrant Communities through Culturally Competent Care

PPGNY is deeply committed to ensuring that all our patients, including immigrant New Yorkers, can secure the health care they need and deserve. Immigrant communities PPGNY serves are still coping with the harmful legacy of the previous Presidential administration, whose anti-immigrant sentiment left these communities unable or reluctant to access health care and coverage. This is compounded by the effects of the SCOTUS decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* which have disproportionately impacted marginalized communities.

That is why today, we respectfully request support from the Immigrant Health initiative to support our Promotores de Salud (PdS) program throughout New York City. In 2024, PPGNY engaged over 3,700 people in the community through this comprehensive community health promotion model. Promotores are native Spanish-speaking peer advocates and educators who integrate sexual and reproductive health information into their community's culture, language, and value system, thus reducing many of the obstacles that Latinx individuals face in obtaining services.

This program is vital for New York City. It is estimated that six in ten New Yorkers are either immigrants or the children of immigrants, nearly one-third of whom are from Latin America. The cultural and language barriers among newly arrived immigrants and foreign-born New Yorkers often keeps these populations out of more formalized health care. It is a priority to reach these populations with culturally resonant information about sexual and reproductive health and services to address health disparities.

Our Promotores are a trusted resource for Latinx individuals seeking family planning services and information, and reflective of the communities they serve. Trained to function as peer health educators in their communities, they promote health services through outreach at local businesses including laundromats and nail salons, through partnerships with community-based organizations and government agencies, and coordinate culturally relevant group education

activities on topics like breast health and birth control. The Promotores' community outreach model includes assisting individuals in making appointments at PPGNY's health centers and often acting as a medical navigator by providing medical interpretation.

This year, we have partnered with NYC Health + Hospitals to offer culturally competent health care services to asylum seekers housed at HERRC centers throughout the city. In 2024, our Community Engagement team engaged over 2,900 new arrivals through outreach and community education activities. Our Promotores are leading sexual and reproductive health outreach and workshops to ensure asylum seekers are equipped with the knowledge to make informed health care decisions as they navigate the complex asylum application process. The Promotores directly connect asylum seekers to services at PPGNY health centers where they receive care no matter their immigration or insurance status.

Ensuring Access to Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare Services

With the ever-changing national landscape and continued attempts to restrict access to care, New York is seen as a haven for critical health care services. We ask the Council to continue to fund PPGNY through the Reproductive and Sexual and Health Initiative to allow us to continue to provide sexual and reproductive health care services and educational programs throughout New York City.

PPGNY requests increased funding of \$1,250,000 from the initiative to allow us to continue to provide health care services and educational programs throughout New York City. Increased funding will help improve an annual budget deficit that threatens access to care for over 7,000 New Yorkers. Longstanding under-investment in reproductive health care on the state level, combined with soaring health care costs, workforce shortages, the havoc wreaked by the COVID pandemic, and care restrictions nationally have contributed to budget shortfall that has forced PPGNY to limit some of our services. In fact, over the past year, we have closed four of our health centers, including our Staten Island center, and consolidated services in affected areas. We reduced our staff and were forced to end our deep sedation care at our Manhattan health center, impacting our ability to provide abortion care later in pregnancy.

Funding from this initiative helps PPGNY provide the full range of sexual and reproductive health care services that includes gynecological care, STI treatment and testing, contraception care, cancer screenings, and LGBTQ+ health care at all four of our NYC health centers. We provide care to the most vulnerable New Yorkers, many who qualify for low- or no-cost services because they are uninsured, low income, have an undocumented immigration status or are otherwise unable to use their insurance due to confidentiality or safety concerns.

This funding also supports trainings to staff at youth serving agencies on how to support access to sexual and reproductive care, youth sexual development, birth control and pregnancy options, and sexually transmitted infection (STIs) and HIV prevention.

Additionally, this funding will support our Youth Health Promoters (YHP) program. The YHPs are highly trained peer educators who engage other young people and conduct interactive workshops to educate youth about teens' rights and access to sexual and reproductive health care. This program helps teens overcome barriers and stigma that they may experience in accessing care. In 2024, the YHP promoters program engaged over 880 young people throughout New York city.

We also request \$1,250,000 from the Speaker's List to support our health care operations and address the financial difficulties we are experiencing.

PPGNY continues to be committed to ensuring that all New Yorkers, no matter their background, get the care they need. It is important that the Council support services and programs to that focus on immigrant communities throughout our city.

We look forward to working with the Council to ensure healthcare access to all.

Thank you.

From: [Candice Braun](#)
To: [Testimony](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] ASLAN Funding
Date: Sunday, March 9, 2025 2:58:49 PM

[REDACTED]

Hello,

I am writing to express support for the continuation of funding for ASLAN. Organizations who are working as part of ASLAN, such as the amazing Lutheran Social Services of New York, are providing much-needed and sometimes even life-saving legal services for some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers. Given the lack of capacity without this added financial support - and given the lack of enough capacity provided by pro bono law firms, this type of legal support is needed now more than ever.

Please continue to fund ASLAN, so the this important work can continue.

Thank you,

Candice Braun

Co-founder and co-director of ROCC (Artists, Athletes, Activists)

[REDACTED]

Joel Sanchez's Testimony

New York City Council Committee on Immigration

Hearing on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2026

March 6, 2025

Good morning to all members of the Immigration Committee and those present,

My name is Joel Sanchez, I am Mexican and have been living in the United States for more than 12 years. I am a day laborer, construction worker, and carpenter by trade.

In this recent period, under the current administration, immigrant workers have been facing increasingly more challenges in our daily lives. Beginning with the scarcity of work and the constant threats of deportation that keep us in a permanent state of anxiety. We are becoming more vulnerable in our workplaces each day, exposed to unsafe conditions, wage theft, labor exploitation, harassment, and physical and psychological pressure generated by the constant fear of not being able to cover our basic needs such as rent and food.

When I arrived in New York, I began working as a construction helper. We were forced to work 10 to 12 hour days, but were only paid as a normal day, without recognition of overtime hours. When a coworker dared to claim their overtime pay, the employer simply responded "there's no more work" and fired them. I, as a newcomer and in need of money, kept silent for fear of losing my job.

Eight years ago, I joined the Workers Justice Project, and thanks to this organization, I learned that I have the right to demand fair payment of my wages, including overtime, and that I can report employers who do not respect labor laws. Currently, I have a case filed with the Department of Labor because I recognize my rights and hope to be recognized for all days worked.

This is just one example of what one learns thanks to community organizations. It is essential that our right to organize be maintained and strengthened, and that organizations continue to exist that advocate for our rights and offer training so that each worker can defend themselves. This is essential to promote dignity at work while we build a fair and sustainable economy in our communities.

I ask you to consider:

Strengthening mechanisms for reporting labor abuses, making them more accessible to people with language barriers

We hope that this committee will continue to facilitate complaints against employers who use threats, intimidation, manipulation, and retaliation against workers due to their immigration status. After so many years building this city, many of us do not have the possibility of a dignified retirement.

New York City has been built with our hands. We deserve protection and respect in the budget.

Thank you for your attention.

Joel Sanchez, Construction Worker, Member of the Workers Justice Project

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Davinda Cohen

Address: 116 Nassau Street

I represent: Nyc Anti-Violence Project

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anh-Thi Nguyen

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn NY 11215

I represent: Democracy at Work Institute

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kayt Tishus

Address: [REDACTED] NY 10038

I represent: collective public affairs

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: CARINA KATIMAN-GUTIERREZ

Address: _____

I represent: Street Vendor Project

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Andres Moreno

Address: _____

I represent: Chinese - American Planning Council (CPC)

Address: 45 Suffolk Street New York, NY 10002

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3.6.25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sophia Gurule

Address: _____

I represent: ALAA-UAW Local 2325

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lois Torres 11232

Address: 443 39th Street, BK NY 11232

I represent: Center for family life of park sunset

Address: 443 39th Street, BK NY 11232

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SAMA OUI MARYAM

Address: 7914 12 AVENUE

I represent: NYCCAL + CUNY City Tech

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Uliana Danilova

Address: [Redacted] Brooklyn, NY

I represent: CityTech CUNY NYCCAL

Address: 300 Jay Street Brooklyn, NY

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: German Benz

Address: [REDACTED] 11 372.

I represent: NYC CAC city tech

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Natalia Anstizabal

Address: _____

I represent: Make the Road NY

Address: [REDACTED] Roosevelt Ave.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sarah Nolan

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn

I represent: kids in Need of Defense

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ernie Goltette

Address: _____

I represent: Mobilization For Justice

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sierra Kraft

Address: _____

I represent: ICARE coalition - legal services

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Leidis Dela Rosa

Address: _____

I represent: La Colmena

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Karla Ostolaza

Address: (NYFUP panel)

I represent: The Bronx Defenders

Address: 360 E 161st St. Bronx, NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deborah Lee

Address: (NYIFUP Panel)

I represent: The Legal Aid Society

Address: 49 Thomas Street, 5th Fl, NY, NY

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: March 6, 2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Catherine Gonzalez

Address: (NYIFUP Panel) with Karla Ostolaza, Deborah Lee

I represent: Brooklyn Defender Services (NYIFUP)

Address: 177 Livingston Street, 7th Fl, Brooklyn, NY

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 03/06/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dmitri Gliniski

Address: New York NY 10040

I represent: Russian-Speaking Community Council

Address: P.O. Box 578, NY NY 10040

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lewie Briggs

Address: 123 William St Ste 401, NY NY 10038

I represent: Take Root Justice

Address: 123 William St. Ste. 401, NY NY 10038

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Navdeep Bains

Address: 120 Wall St, F19

I represent: Asian American Federation

Address: testifying on panel w Language

collaborative

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aracelis Maw

Address: 528 Commonwealth Ave Bx NY 10473

I represent: Masa

Address: 2770 Third Ave Bronx NY 10455

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Edgardo Garcia

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn, NY

I represent: Workers Justice Project

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: PAULA INHARGUE

Address: _____

I represent: UNITED NEIGHBORHOOD HOUSES

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ligia Gualpa

Address: 365 Broadway

I represent: Workers Justice Project

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Paulina Cohen

Address: _____

I represent: NYC Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence

Address: Project

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3-6-2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: NAIMA DAHIR - Budget +

Address: Advocacy

I represent: Arab-American Family Support

Address: Center

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Taina Wagnac - Language Access

Address: Airchakhue Omoragbon - Language Access Panel

I represent: NY Immigration Coalition

Address: African Communities Together

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Airenakhue Omoragbon - Language

Address: Access Panel

I represent: African Communities Together

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aracelis Lugo - Language Access

Address: Panel

I represent: MASA

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nardeep Bains

Address: 115 Lurob

I represent: MAA American Federation

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: William Medina

Address: 365 Broadway

I represent: Workers Justice Project - Los Universitarios Unidos

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JOSE CORONA DIAZ

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jorge Pro Reyes

Address: [REDACTED]

I represent: Mixteca Organization

Address: 245 23rd Street

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joel Sanchez

Address: 4112 4th Ave Brooklyn NY

I represent: Writers Justice Project

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Walter Fendrich

Address: [REDACTED] NYC 10044

I represent: Libertas Center for Human Rights

Address: 79-01 Broadway, Annex G, 5th Floor, Elmhurst

11373

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Molly Schaeffer, Director

Address: _____

I represent: OASO

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lorena Lucero, Deputy Commissioner of Programs

Address: and Policy

I represent: MOJA

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jasniya Sanchez, Deputy Commissioner of

Address: Administration and Strategic Initiatives

I represent: MOJA

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Commissioner Manuel Castro

Address: _____

I represent: MOJA

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kelly Agnew-Barajas

Address: _____

I represent: Catholic Charities Arch of NY

Address: 80 Maiden Lane NY NY 10038

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Margaret Martin

Address: _____

I represent: Catholic Charities Arch of NY

Address: 80 Maiden Lane, NY NY 10038

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ira Yankwitz

Address: [Redacted] Brooklyn

I represent: Literacy Assistance Center / NYC Coalition for

Address: 85 Broad St. NY Adult Literacy

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Preliminary Budget Hearing Date: 3/6/2025

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Meetu Dhar

Address: [Redacted] New York City NY 10730

I represent: Cony citizenship Now

Address: 555 W 57th Street New York, NY 10019

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sophie Dalsimer

Address: 151 W. 35th St, 11th floor, NY, NY 10001

I represent: New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

Address: [Redacted]

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/25

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Vladimir Tlali - Language Access

Address: Panel

I represent: NY Immigration Coalition

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 3/6/28

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Christopher Johnson

Address: _____

I represent: Self

Address: _____

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