

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY  
WITH COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES

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October 14, 2020

Start: 10:11 a.m.

Recess: 1:47 p.m.

HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING

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

Deborah Rose,  
Chairperson of Committee on Youth  
Services

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

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Lilian Kong

Jonathan Ekblad  
Teacher and Administrator at the University  
Settlement Adult Literacy Program

Colette Samman  
Deputy Commissioner for Strategic Programs at  
IDNYC at the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

Rong Zhang  
Assistant Commissioner for Literacy and Immigrant  
Initiatives at the Department of Youth and  
Community Development

Steven Mahoney  
Assistant Director of Adult English Language  
Literacy at the New York Public Library

Fatma Ghailan  
Assistant Director of the Adult Learner Program  
at Queens Public Library

Haniff Toussaint  
Brooklyn Public Library's ESOL & Business English  
Program Coordinator

Ira Yankwitt  
Executive Director of the Literacy Assistance  
Center

Lena Cohen  
Policy Analyst at United Neighborhood Houses

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Liza Schwartzwald  
Manager of Education Policy at the New York  
Immigration Coalition

Stacie Evans  
University Director for Language and Literacy  
Programs at CUNY

Pabitra Khati Benjamin  
Executive Director of Adhikaar

Ravi Reddi  
Associate Director for Advocacy and Policy at the  
Asian American Federation

Jeehae Fischer  
Executive Director of the Korean American Family  
Service Center KAFSC

Selvia Sikder  
Program Director at India Home

Karen Zhou  
Executive Director of Homecrest Community  
Services

Xiaoli Qiao  
Program Director of Adult Literacy at the YWCA of  
Queens

Jennifer Argueta  
Program Manager of Adult Education at Northern  
Manhattan Improvement Corporation

## A P P E A R A N C E S (CONT.)

Tazmin Uddin

Youth Program Director at Turning Point for Women  
and Families

Hannah Babiss

Master of Social Work Student at Fordham  
University

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH  
COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES

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SERGEANT BIONDO: PC recording started.

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SERGEANT PEREZ: Backup recording started.

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SERGEANT HOPE: Sergeant Polite, you may begin  
with your opening statement.

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SERGEANT POLITE: Thank you. Good morning,  
welcome to the remote hearing on the Committee on  
Immigration jointly with the Committee on Youth  
Services. Will all Council Members and staff please  
turn on their videos at this time. Thank you.

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To minimize disruptions, please place all  
cellphones, electronics to vibrate. You may send  
your testimony at [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). That's  
[testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov). Chair's, we are ready to  
begin.

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CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. [GAVEL]  
Buenos Dias el alto los. I am Carlos Menchaca, Chair  
of the City Council's Committee on Immigration.  
Today, the Committee on Immigration is joined by the  
Committee on Youth Services and I want to welcome  
Council Member and Chair Deborah Rose from Staten  
Island. We also have members of the Committee's  
here, Council Member Dromm, Council Member Louis and  
Council Member Chin.

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2 Today, we are conducting an Oversight on the  
3 City's Adult Literacy Programming, highlighting the  
4 gaps in Adult Literacy and Digital Literacy in our  
5 Immigrant Communities. Today's hearing has special  
6 significance to me. Having been raised in a non-  
7 English speaking household, I know first hand the  
8 burden of translating for my mom, a single mom. Our  
9 family needed access to government resources like  
10 food, healthcare and housing. I know the difficulty  
11 of accessing basic services and when all that  
12 information was available in English and poorly  
13 translated to Spanish, it was hard.

14 That's what our families are experiencing today.  
15 Adult literacy is a national issue, regardless of  
16 country of origin, in the U.S. more than 36 million  
17 adults can not read or write in English. Of these,  
18 only 10 percent of adults in need of literacy  
19 education received services. More than two-thirds of  
20 all literacy programs in the country struggle with  
21 long student waiting lists.

22 For many of the adult literacy providers who  
23 joined us today, the picture painted by national data  
24 is not foreign to New York City. 2009 data released  
25 by the United Neighborhood Houses, found that 2.2

1  
2 million adult New Yorkers or one-third of all adult  
3 New Yorkers lack English proficiency. Of those, at  
4 least 15,000 New Yorkers are on waiting lists for  
5 adult literacy classes as of 2015. And that is  
6 according to the New York City Coalition for Adult  
7 Literacy. I expect that we may hear updates of these  
8 numbers during the public panel portion of today's  
9 hearing.

10 Immigrant New Yorkers are disproportionately  
11 impacted by low literacy levels. Half of all  
12 immigrant New Yorkers identify as limited English  
13 proficient. More than twice their U.S. born  
14 counterparts. Low literacy and English language  
15 proficiency among parents has direct highs to lower  
16 educational outcomes of their children and we see all  
17 of this in the New York City data, where nearly a  
18 quarter of children growing up in mixed status  
19 immigrant homes, tend to be less proficient in  
20 English themselves. Compared to just 5 percent of  
21 the U.S. born peers.

22 The last six months have highlighted an  
23 additional barrier to immigrant New Yorkers, a gap in  
24 digital literacy. As programming and services have  
25 gone from in-person to online and remote, we can't

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2 ignore that at least one-fourth of foreign born  
3 workers have limited digital skills, in 2020. This  
4 could mean that as many as one in four immigrant New  
5 Yorkers have struggled to access any number of  
6 critical services over the last six months and may  
7 continue to do so. If we do not offer additional  
8 support to bridge the digital literacy gap.

9 In the most destabilizing year of the last  
10 century, we must not lose sight of our investment in  
11 the next generation. As such, we expect to hear a  
12 commitment from the Administration to ensure that  
13 immigrant New Yorkers are able to access adult  
14 literacy classes and to hear how remote based  
15 programs and services have fought to retain immigrant  
16 constituencies.

17 I want to thank Chair Rose, Chair of the  
18 Committee on Youth Services and also on the BNT for  
19 joining this hearing today. As well as the staff  
20 behind the scenes making sure that the online hearing  
21 runs smoothly. I would like to thank Committee staff  
22 for their work. Committee Counsel Harbani Ahuja,  
23 Policy Analyst Elizabeth Kronk, Finance United Head  
24 Crilhien Francisco and Finance Analyst Florentine  
25 Kabore.



COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH  
COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES

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2 Youth Services Committee Staff include Paul  
3 Sinegal who is the Committee Counsel, Policy Analyst  
4 Anastassia Zimina, Finance Unit Head Eisha Wright,  
5 Finance Analyst Michele Peregrin. A big thank you to  
6 my staff as well. My Chief of Staff Lorena Lucero  
7 and Legislative Director Cesar Vargas.

8 And with that, I want to turn it over to my Co-  
9 Chair for remarks, Chair Rose.

10 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Good morning and thank you all  
11 for being here. I want to thank everyone and I want  
12 to especially thank Council Member Menchaca for  
13 sharing your personal perspectives on today's  
14 hearing. You know, your experiences echo the  
15 experiences of countless immigrants in New York City.  
16 They are very well appreciated and I want to  
17 acknowledge and thank you for sharing them.

18 I am Council Member Deborah Rose; I am the Chair  
19 of the Youth Services Committee and I would like to  
20 extend a very warm welcome and thank you to our  
21 literacy advocates, our program providers and  
22 everyone who is testifying here today. I also want  
23 to thank the Department of Youth and Community  
24 Development. Your programs touch more lives than  
25

1 many of our other city agencies combined. And you  
2 impact is appreciated.

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4 I would also like to thank the Mayor's Office of  
5 Immigrant Affairs. You are a vital part of today's  
6 discussion and you are also making an important  
7 impact in the quality of life in our immigrant  
8 communities. We are looking forward to hearing from  
9 both of you today.

10 But as an oversight body, we must ask you tough  
11 questions and we must push you to do more because New  
12 Yorkers need your support even more today during  
13 today's trying times, your literacy programs are so  
14 important and they need your support.

15 Every September, the United Nations Educational  
16 Scientific and Cultural Organization, also known as  
17 UNESCO, observes International Literacy Day. Last  
18 year's 219 theme was, which seemed so very long ago,  
19 was literacy and multilingualism.

20 This year's theme; however, focuses on literacy,  
21 teaching and learning during the COVID-19 crisis.  
22 The COVID-19 crisis has been a stark reminder of the  
23 gaps that exist between the advantaged and the  
24 disadvantaged. Even as we come together as a city to  
25 develop COVID response plans, many of those who

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2 benefit from city programs find themselves more  
3 marginalized because they lack literacy proficiency.

4 On top of this and what I would call a cruel  
5 twist, much of our response to these communities have  
6 been a reliance on remote platforms and therein lies  
7 the [INAUDIBLE 8:22]. In order to access these  
8 platforms, vulnerable communities need expensive  
9 technology such as computers, tablets and internet  
10 service. Moreover, they need to know how to use this  
11 technology. Many sadly do not, as a whole lot of New  
12 Yorkers do not.

13 As COVID-19 forces us to embrace new pedagogies  
14 through remote platforms, digital literacy has  
15 therefore created an even greater divide between  
16 those with access and those without. That is just  
17 not acceptable.

18 In my remarks last September, I mentioned that  
19 throughout history, literacy has been a method of  
20 social control and oppression because the ability to  
21 read and write determines where people stand within  
22 the social hierarchy. Indeed, literacy was  
23 weaponized as a way to keep the rich powerful and the  
24 poor powerless.

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2       In the era of COVID-19, digital literacy may well  
3 be doing the same thing. More than ever before  
4 during our recent history, we need to provide access  
5 to both literacy and digital literacy resources.  
6 That means you, as agencies, have to rethink your  
7 approaches to literacy programming and be flexible  
8 enough to make sure that your providers and program  
9 participants are empowered to adapt to this new  
10 normal of COVID-19.

11       We have lots of questions for you, but first I  
12 would like to acknowledge my colleagues who have  
13 joined us. And again, I want to say, thank you to  
14 Council Member and Chair Menchaca for hosting this  
15 important hearing and I see we have been joined by  
16 Council Member Chin and I think Council Member  
17 Menchaca acknowledged the Council Members that are  
18 here. I think and I would also like to thank my  
19 staff Isa Cortez, Vanorie Ranawara[SP?], Christian  
20 Revallo[SP?] and the Committee Staff, Paul Sinegal,  
21 Ana Zimina and Michele Peregrin along with our  
22 community engagement representative Elizabeth Arts.

23       I will now turn to my Co-Chair Council Member  
24 Menchaca to kick off some of the procedural items and  
25 Introductions. Thank you.

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH  
COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES

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2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Chair Rose and  
3 again thank you for that commitment. I want to also  
4 highlight the work of the Budget Negotiation Team  
5 around adult literacy.

6 We have the Chair of the Finance Committee here  
7 as well. Chair Dromm of the Finance Committee and  
8 really the entire BNT that fought to keep most of the  
9 adult literacy money intact and we're going to talk  
10 about that today and that is because of the  
11 championship of the members who understand the  
12 importance of this. And those hard questions are  
13 still going to come to the Administration about how  
14 this is being executed and what we can do to continue  
15 that.

16 We have also been joined by Council Member  
17 Mathieu Eugene from Brooklyn. So, welcome to you and  
18 I am going to hand it over to our Committee Council  
19 Harbani Ahuja to go over some of the procedural  
20 items.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. My name is  
22 Harbani Ahuja and I am Counsel to the Committee on  
23 Immigration for the New York City Council. Before we  
24 begin, I want to remind everyone that you will be on  
25 mute until you are called on to testify, at which

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2 point you will be unmuted by the host. I will be  
3 calling on panelists to testify. Please listen for  
4 your name to be called. I will be periodically  
5 announcing who the next panelist will be.

6 The first panel will consist of members of the  
7 public followed by members from the Administration  
8 followed by libraries, adult literacy providers,  
9 advocates and additional members of the public. All  
10 hearing participants should submit written testimony  
11 to [testimony@council.nyc.gov](mailto:testimony@council.nyc.gov).

12 I would like to remind everyone that unlike our  
13 typical Council hearings, we will be calling on  
14 individuals one by one to testify. Each panelist  
15 will be given three minutes to speak. Please begin  
16 once the Sergeant has started the timer.

17 Council Members who have questions for a  
18 particular panelist should use the raise hand  
19 function in Zoom and I will call on you after the  
20 panelists have completed their testimony.

21 For panelists, once your name is called, a member  
22 of our staff will unmute you and the Sergeant at Arms  
23 will give you the go ahead to begin upon setting the  
24 timer. Please wait for the Sergeant to announce that  
25 you may begin before delivering your testimony.

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We will now hear testimony from our first panel.

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I would like to welcome Lilian Kong to testify, after

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Lilian I will be calling on Jonathan Ekblad and then

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Jinhee Kim to testify. Lilian Kong, you may begin

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when you are ready.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now. You may

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proceed.

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LILIAN KONG: Hello?

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Yes, we can hear you ma'am.

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LILIAN KONG: Okay, okay, hello, my name is

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Lilian and I started learning English at the Chinese

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American Planning Council for one year. I started to

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learn English so that I could become more

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independent, continue my education, find a job and

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help with my daughters education.

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Today, I want to tell you about my experience

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learning from home during the COVID-19 outbreak and

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the importance of English in my life.

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Before I came to the United States four years

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ago, I looked forward to the bright future. However,

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due to my lack of the English ability, this dream was

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defeated by reality. When I first went around, I

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didn't even dare to go shopping and I couldn't get

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around on the subway alone. I was afraid to

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2 communicate with others and I couldn't embarrass  
3 myself. I still haven't found a job, which is very  
4 stressful for me. And I am very independent person  
5 but I have to rely on my husband for financial  
6 support.

7 Another reason I want to learn English is to help  
8 with my daughters education and I am also worried  
9 that I won't be able to have a conversation with her  
10 in the future. After starting English, I can read  
11 stories to her and I tried to make her friends at the  
12 park.

13 After COVID-19 outbreak CPC started to have  
14 English classes online. I have to take care of my  
15 daughters every day, so it is difficult to study  
16 English, so my classmates and I made a lot of  
17 progress in our online classes. CPC also shares  
18 information with us about the news, the essentials  
19 and the COVID-19. So, I am very grateful that the  
20 CPC still provides to new immigrants in such a  
21 difficult time and I am also wired directly to my  
22 teacher to teach us. Because of the coronavirus, I  
23 think, in the units, they will be more difficult in  
24 the future. Immigrants will be misunderstood or  
25 discriminated against. If we can't speak English,



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2 how can we defend ourselves? We need English to  
3 communicate with others and keep ourselves safe.  
4 English classes are even more important for  
5 immigrants now than they were before the outbreak.

6 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Lilian. Thank  
8 you.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
10 I will now be calling on Jonathan Ekblad. You may  
11 begin when you are ready.

12 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

13 JONATHAN ECKBLAD: Hi, I am Jonathan Ekblad; I am  
14 a Teacher and Administrator at the University  
15 Settlement Adult Literacy Program on the lower east  
16 side. Thank you for inviting me here today and thank  
17 you Lilian for speaking.

18 In our program, our students have faced some  
19 similar challenges that Lilian described. A big  
20 challenge is for students who have children at home,  
21 who have to help their own children with online  
22 learning and so many of our students have not been  
23 able to continue their own online learning in our  
24 English classes because they have to help their  
25 children.

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2       And another difficulty with our program has been  
3 really trying to help those students who struggle  
4 with digital literacy, using technology. Students  
5 whose Wi-Fi or internet bandwidth isn't so strong and  
6 it is very difficult to reach the students who  
7 probably you know, need the most help. And they are  
8 – you know, we try to provide one on one help over  
9 the phone but it is very difficult when there is that  
10 distance there.

11       I think the other unfortunate affect of COVID has  
12 been that the sense of community within classes has  
13 kind of been lost just because you know, everything  
14 is mediated over Zoom or over Google Classroom and  
15 so, just kind of private conversations between  
16 students and then you know, relying on each other and  
17 giving advice and getting to know each other. That's  
18 kind of lost in the online environment.

19       So, looking forward, I would guess maybe we will  
20 have a hybrid model of online learning and remote  
21 learning but it is very difficult just for us as a  
22 program to gauge the safety and how much we should  
23 encourage students to start coming in for in person  
24 classes and we're not public health experts.

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2       So, just from an administrative standpoint,  
3 that's been very difficult to consider, make any sort  
4 of decision about. And I am finished talking.

5       CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank you for  
6 your testimony today.

7       COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
8 I will now be calling on Jinhee Kim to testify, you  
9 may begin when you are ready.

10       SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

11       JINHEE KIM: Hi, my name is Jinhee Kim and I am  
12 working as a Program Coordinator with Jon at  
13 University Settlement and then also in the evening, I  
14 teach in the Bronx Community College.

15       Yeah, I have been teaching all the times, like, I  
16 could see the change after the pandemic started. And  
17 then I see a lot of like challenges that's like a  
18 fall on our students. But I was impressed that our  
19 students never gave up, even though it is really  
20 difficult because a lot of students, they lost their  
21 jobs during the pandemic.

22       So, we had some students who didn't even have  
23 food to eat but they didn't stop like learning  
24 English. They still came to school, like online and  
25 then also, you know, in New York City in March and

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April it was very serious but later it got better.  
And then, our students were the first ones who had to go back to work because they have to work as cashiers in the supermarkets or cleaning people in like hospitals or hotels but they were not ready, like, you know, a lot of us. You know, they were still afraid but they still needed to make money for their family. So, they had to go because if they don't go they are going to get fired.

So, they went there. So, a lot of students had to go back to work and so, they had to like drop the class or they, like were texting me. Like, teacher, can you wait for me? I am on my way home, so I can join your class later. I don't want to cancel.

So, they were really struggling a lot but they didn't give up. So, sometimes it was very like touching and then I became very emotional but as like Jon said, we have a lot of students who are parents. So, when they to learn in the morning, they couldn't because they have to you know, give their computer or their smartphone to their kids who have to learn. They think their kids are more important than their education.

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2       So, they are not the priority because kids are  
3 important for them, right? And then also, a lot of  
4 students, they are living in the neighborhoods where  
5 their internet is not strong. So, during my class, I  
6 have a lot of students like a going out and then  
7 coming back because their internet is not stable but  
8 they get so frustrated because of that but they don't  
9 give up. So, I really like praise them about that.  
10 You know, their strength and then their willingness  
11 not to give up but you know, as a teacher I feel so  
12 bad because we cannot really support them a lot  
13 especially about the – you know like with these  
14 little devices and the strong internet.

15       So, I wish we could do something. I know like  
16 for kids, like a K-12 day, like you know, let out the  
17 – what is it like a rented, like a tablet or  
18 computers but although students, we don't have that  
19 kind of luxury.

20       SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

21       JINHEE KIM: Okay, thank you.

22       COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

23 I will now be calling on Council Members for  
24 questions in the order they have used the Zoom raised  
25 hand function. Council Members, if you would like to

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2 ask the question and you have not yet used the Zoom  
3 raised hand function, please do so now.

4 I see Council Member Chin has a question.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Okay, thank you. Thank you  
6 Chairs. Good morning and thank you for the  
7 testimony, Lilian and the teachers. I know how  
8 committed you know all of you are and you know, my  
9 background is also in education and I ran programs,  
10 ESL programs and college programs. My question is  
11 that I guess it is really related to a budget  
12 question. Is that, how do we you know, I guess we  
13 have to fight for more resources, so that the adult  
14 student will have the hot spot or whatever in the  
15 tablet, so that they don't have to fight with you  
16 know, the children to get it.

17 So, I think that's something that we have to  
18 commit to and also in the funding that we have fought  
19 for that there should be allocations for equipment's  
20 for the students. Just like we did for the  
21 Department you know, of Education for our children.  
22 It is not perfect, you know, there is still a lot we  
23 got to do. Same thing with our seniors.

24 You know the city gave out tablets to seniors but  
25 not all seniors got it and a lot of them don't really

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know how to use it and going you know, in the future, for seniors who go to senior centers want to participate in programs, that's going to be the future. They would have to also learn how to use the computer tablet to participate.

So, I think that's something that we really need to look at. Having the resources to assist you know a student to learn and seniors and you know, an ESL student. The question I have is that have the providers thought about using other forms of you know more flexible, whether you know recording the classes, whether it is on you tube or I don't know what other platform, so that the student can access it later. Like if they can participate in a classroom because they have to work but they can sign on later to be able to still get the lessons that was taught that day.

So, if there are ways that we can help to work with the provider to see if there are other creative ways to provide the lessons and the participation, whether there is also group learning among the students themselves. I don't know, I am not tech savvy. Like with Zoom, you know you have meeting rooms and how do you separate out.

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So, I think that's something that going you know, towards the future, we really got to find ways to make it more flexible so that people can you know, learn and participate and be involved in that and I hope that you know the Administration and DYCD to really look at innovative programs that can help those students take advantage of learning ESL. So, it doesn't have to be you have to physically go to a class at 9 o'clock but you might be able to sign onto the class in the evening and be able to participate while your kids are sleeping and you have some time, you can do that.

So, that's something that I think going forward hopefully working together with the providers and the Administration we could find some creative ways of providing these classes that are so vital. And that's why it is so frustrating when we were fighting during the budget time that the Administration, you know, they always cut the funding.

I said, this is a no brainer. The parents and you know, immigrant adults wants to learn English because that's the only way that they know that they can you know, help their students, you know, help their kids and get a better job. It is a no brainer



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and we need to invest money in that and every year we have to fight the Administration and the Council has to put the money back in.

So, we just hope that we can really make a change to really have a better future in terms of how everyone will have the benefit of learning. You know, from young student to all the way to our seniors. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member. I would like to now turn it to Council Member Menchaca.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you and if there are no questions, I just want to say thank you to this public panel. That's the tradition in the Immigration Committee really to hear from people on the ground that are experiencing issues and allowing that to frame the discussion that we hear from teachers and Lilian, who is at home and wants to learn and I think that all of these issues we are going to explore with the Administration and the CBO's. And so, I just want to say thank you to the panel for being here for speaking your truth and everything that Council Member Chin said is not only right on. That's going to be the struggle as we get towards the next budget. Thank you.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Council Member Rose.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Yes, I am just really concerned. Council Member Chin, you know, talked about you know people being able to log on in the evening at 9 o'clock. I am just wondering about whether or not the clients have been able to join the classes with the technology that they already have or is there a need for specific technology to be made available to them, so that they can engage. Especially in light of you know, the distance learning through COVID. I guess Jonathan.

JONATHAN ECKBLAD: Yeah, I think what Council Member Chin mentioned hot spots would be nice where it is a more stable internet connection. Just about everybody has smartphones these days but they are not ideal for some of the activities and some of the things we do. So, you know, ideally a laptop. A laptop and a hot spot, I think that would be perfect.

And just to address what Council Member Chin also mentioned. We do - our program does have - we have different schedules, so we try and fit peoples personal availability but we do, you know, we use Google Classroom, so most of the activities and assignments and everything are right there and

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students can ask the teacher questions and everything.

So, if a student can't get online or is very busy or something, they are able to later go back and kind of catch up. It's not quite the same thing as being in the class and interacting with classmates but there is that capability there to.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Do you find that they have access to the technology that they need to do that to participate? Is there a need for more resources and how do they access that technology if they don't have it you know, personally?

JONATHAN ECKBLAD: You know, I think - can you rephrase the question a little bit? Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Are the programs providing technology for students who want to participate in your programs?

JONATHAN ECKBLAD: I don't know about all their programs but we have not been providing any technology. We just have to work with what the students have. First of all, you know, there is a question of you know, we really don't want them coming in. Our organization has many different programs and everything, so we really didn't want

1  
2 them coming in to like pick things up and as far as I  
3 know our budget just doesn't allow for that kind of  
4 big expenditure on technology you know in giving it  
5 out to students.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Jonathan, my question isn't  
7 you know, to put you on the spot. I'm just trying to  
8 just figure out you know, if access to technology is  
9 a problem for you know, ESL learners and learners who  
10 want to participate in these programs, if access to  
11 technology is not, you know, available then that's an  
12 additional barrier that we have to try to figure out  
13 how to address, that's all.

14 JONATHAN ECKBLAD: Yeah, definitely, definitely  
15 and I think a hot spot and a laptop for every student  
16 that needs it would be perfect.

17 I don't know if anybody else has any other  
18 teachers or if anybody else has any ideas about that.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER ROSE: Thank you Jonathan, thank  
20 you.

21 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
22 I will now be calling on Representatives from the  
23 Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to testify. MOIA  
24 testimony will be provided by MOIA Deputy  
25 Commissioner of Strategic Initiatives and IDNYC

1  
2 Colette Samman. Additionally, Executive Director of  
3 Programs Alexandra Ruiz will be available for  
4 answering questions. After MOIA testifies, I will be  
5 calling on Representatives from the Department of  
6 Youth and Community Development to testify.

7 DYCD testimony will be provided by DYCD Assistant  
8 Commissioner of Literacy and Immigrant Initiatives  
9 Rong Zhang. As a reminder, during the hearing if  
10 Council Members would like to ask a question of the  
11 Administration or of a specific panelist, please use  
12 the Zoom raise hand function and I will call on you  
13 in order.

14 Before we begin, I will administer the oath.  
15 Deputy Commissioner Colette Samman, Executive  
16 Director Alexandra Ruiz and Assistant Commissioner  
17 Rong Zhang.

18 I will call on you each individually for a  
19 response. Please raise your right hand. Do you  
20 affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing  
21 but the truth in your testimony before this Committee  
22 and to respond honestly to Council Member questions?  
23 Deputy Commissioner Samman?

24 COLETTE SAMMAN: Yes.  
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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Executive  
Director Alexandra Ruiz?

ALEXANDRA RUIZ: Yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Assistant  
Commissioner Rong Zhang?

RONG ZHANG: Yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. Deputy  
Commissioner Samman, you may begin when you are  
ready.

COLETTE SAMMAN: Thank you. Thank you to  
Chairman Menchaca, Chair Rose and the Members of the  
Committee on Immigration and Youth Services. My name  
is Colette Samman, I am the Deputy Commissioner for  
Strategic Programs at IDNYC at the Mayor's Office of  
Immigrant Affairs.

MOIA and the city as a whole have long recognized  
that literacy is crucial for the realization of an  
individuals full potential, as well as their  
increased social, economic and political empowerment.

Students have also shown a positive  
intergenerational spill over from adult literacy,  
which can improve parents access to information,  
resources they need, to invest in their child's  
development and education.

1  
2 New York City is one of the most linguistically  
3 diverse city's in the world. More than 200 languages  
4 are spoken by residents across the five boroughs.  
5 This diversity comes with challenges. We know that  
6 many New Yorkers have limited English proficiency,  
7 especially immigrant New Yorkers. Almost half of all  
8 Immigrant New Yorkers and about 60 percent of  
9 undocumented New Yorkers have LEP.

10 Moreover, almost a quarter of all immigrant New  
11 Yorkers and 32 percent of undocumented immigrant New  
12 Yorkers do not have a high school diploma compared to  
13 10 percent of U.S. born New Yorkers. For this  
14 reason, MOIA and our agency partners are deeply  
15 invested in providing access to adult literacy  
16 programs for New Yorkers.

17 Today's testimony focuses on MOIA's we speak New  
18 York City program and the shifts MOIA has made to  
19 adjust to the COVID-19 pandemic. MOIA plays an  
20 important role in adult literacy field through our We  
21 Speak New York City program. We Speak New York City,  
22 is different from other ESOL programming because it  
23 serves both learners and educators with materials  
24 that speak directly to city services and how to  
25 access them.

1  
2 Through We Speak, MOIA coordinates a set of  
3 volunteer led English conversation classes that uses  
4 episodes of the Emmy Award Winning We Speak NYC  
5 television show and other materials over the course  
6 of seven to ten weeks.

7 The classes address common issues and challenges  
8 encountered by immigrants and help students learn  
9 about available city services, as well as resources  
10 that are relevant to their lives. Students can also  
11 engage with independent study tools for each episode.  
12 These materials also support the educators. MOIA has  
13 a strong collaborative relationship with adult  
14 literacy service providers in New York City and  
15 provides We Speak multimedia curriculum for free.

16 The curriculum includes videos, lesson plans,  
17 student activities, study guides and more for  
18 providers of the ESOL and other adult literacy  
19 classes across the city. These materials are highly  
20 adaptable for learners with different goals and  
21 proficiency levels and have been widely utilized in a  
22 variety of education settings.

23 We Speak NYC is an important and an effective  
24 program that makes a significant contribution to the  
25 city's adult literacy landscape. Moreover, at a time



1  
2 when students are struggling with job and income  
3 loss, among other challenges, access to help learning  
4 English is more necessary than ever. 88 percent of  
5 We Speak New York City providers we surveyed, said  
6 pandemic related challenges have been exacerbated for  
7 students who have limited reading, writing, English  
8 language and/or digital literacy skills.

9 For that reason, when the world changed because  
10 of COVID-19, We Speak NYC quickly changed its gear to  
11 ensure education could continue without a significant  
12 interruption. This was not without challenges. More  
13 than two-thirds of We Speak, New York City providers  
14 we surveyed have said that the shift to remote  
15 teaching required them to provide new training to  
16 educators and staff on digital education and about  
17 half of our providers noted that they had to adapt to  
18 using new technology to meet the needs of their  
19 students.

20 Despite hurdles, we managed to transition our  
21 program into remote model in just two weeks.  
22 Delivering all programmatic activities and services  
23 online. This includes continuing our volunteered led  
24 classes in a new format with weekly online  
25 conversation classes that covered COVID-19 themes and

1  
2 resources available to immigrant New Yorkers. We  
3 have also conducted Know Your Rights presentations,  
4 emailed resources to our students and provided weekly  
5 student packets for We Speak NYC conversation classes  
6 to students with information on NYC services and  
7 other educational materials.

8 MOIA continues to promote We Speak NYC through  
9 outreach to different community based organizations  
10 as well as collaboration with other organizations.  
11 This includes a recently launched online promotional  
12 campaign in partnership with CUNY schools, libraries,  
13 and CBO's.

14 As we have transitioned into this new all-digital  
15 world, we have noticed some trends. Adult learners  
16 who already have reliable technology and internet  
17 access have gained new benefits for remote learning  
18 including the ability to limit travel and childcare  
19 needs, participate in classes at a wider range of  
20 time and attend classes even if they are ill or less  
21 mobile. Students and teachers have also been gaining  
22 digital literacy skills while engaging with contact  
23 online.

24 While we recognize that students have uneven  
25 access to information at communication technologies,

1  
2 We Speak NYC is continuously working to address these  
3 issues and plans and to continue operating classes  
4 and workshops for educators remotely.

5 In the weeks ahead, we will be surveying our  
6 partner sites to better understand the reopening  
7 plans and how they may affect service delivery.

8 Adult literacy programs have risen to the challenges  
9 of this pandemic, quickly adapting their instructions  
10 for remote platforms like Zoom, Google Classroom,  
11 What's Up and providing additional one on one support  
12 to their students.

13 However, these providers including our We Speak  
14 New York City partners still face enormous  
15 challenges. Many students are facing job loss,  
16 housing insecurity, childcare burden and health  
17 issues and such hardship makes it difficult for them  
18 to prioritize education.

19 MOIA has developed the comprehensive immigrant  
20 resource guide for immigrant New Yorkers seeking  
21 assistance and this information is shared with our We  
22 Speak NYC program participants.

23 MOIA and our partners have successfully  
24 brainstormed and collaborating on addressing many of  
25 these challenges and remain committed to finding ways

1  
2 to help our learners, providers, and community  
3 partners in this difficult time.

4 Thank you again for the opportunity to testify  
5 and I am happy to take any questions.

6 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
7 I will now turn it over to Assistant Commissioner  
8 Rong Zhang. You may begin when you are ready.

9 RONG ZHANG: Good morning Chair Rose, Chair  
10 Menchaca and Members of the Youth Services and  
11 Immigration Committee's. I am Rong Zhang, Assistant  
12 Commissioner for Literacy and Immigrant Initiatives  
13 at the Department of Youth and Community Development.

14 On behalf of DYCD Commissioner Bill Chong, thank  
15 you for the opportunity to comment on DYCD's adult  
16 literacy services. The ability to read and write is  
17 fundamental to a persons capacity to succeed in life.  
18 English proficiency is associated with the ability to  
19 find and keep employment that pays a living wage and  
20 provides opportunities for upward advancement. Helps  
21 parents fully support and participate in their  
22 child's education and actively engage in civic life.

23 The most recent Census data for New York City  
24 shows that there are 1.76 million or 22.4 percent of  
25 individuals age five years and over who speak English

1  
2 less than very well and 544,714 or 9.1 percent of  
3 persons age 25 years and over who have less than a  
4 9<sup>th</sup> grade education.

5       These data point towards a high need for ESOL  
6 instruction and adult basic education classes. In  
7 neighborhoods with large, low income immigrant  
8 populations in need is particularly high. For  
9 example, Queens community districts 3 and 7, that is  
10 Jackson Heights and Flushing and Brooklyn community  
11 District 11, Bensonhurst have the highest populations  
12 of persons who speak English less than very well and  
13 Manhattan community District 12, that's Washington  
14 Heights Inwood area. Queens 3, Jackson Heights, and  
15 Brooklyn 7 Sunset Park have the highest populations  
16 of persons who have less than 9<sup>th</sup> grade education.

17       These findings are supported by DYCD's  
18 Comprehensive Community Needs Assessment Survey. A  
19 survey that collected information from the residents  
20 or asked about other questions to identify the  
21 service gaps in their community.

22       In New York City overall, survey residents ranked  
23 English classes as the number two service gap from a  
24 listing of 28 items. In ten communities, residents  
25 ranked English classes as their number one service

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2 gap. Six communities have ranked adult education  
3 literacy instruction as among the top five service  
4 gaps.

5 We thank the Council for its strong longstanding  
6 partnership on adult literacy programs. It has been  
7 critical to funding programs across the city. DYCD  
8 commits \$50 million to support adult literacy  
9 programs from a mix of federal community service  
10 block grant CSBG and a community development block  
11 grant CDBG funding and city tax levy funding. This  
12 work is complimented by other literacy programs  
13 supported by the Department of Education, the City  
14 University of New York and the public library  
15 systems.

16 DYCD's adult literacy programs include a variety  
17 of courses to meet the various needs of participants.  
18 For example, these adult literacy programs offer  
19 adult basic education that teaches both native and  
20 nonnative English speakers, reading, writing and  
21 math. We offer high school equivalency prep classes  
22 to prepare students for test assessing secondary  
23 completion, known as TASC. ESOL civics classes and  
24 English for speakers of other language classes teach  
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1  
2 listening, speaking, reading and writing to  
3 individuals whose primary language is not English.

4 In Fiscal Year 2020, our adult literacy programs  
5 enrolled 15,631 participants. Students not only  
6 benefit academically by participating in our literacy  
7 programs, they also receive other much needed  
8 assistance such as referral to employment training,  
9 college assistance and individual support. To assist  
10 in Korea and college exploration with participants,  
11 DYCD has partnered with CUNY to train our  
12 instructor's confidence case managers on their career  
13 kids curriculum.

14 The participants learn how to meet literacy goals  
15 while simultaneously learning about Korea's  
16 incorporating Korea in reading, writing, math and  
17 research activities. Learning about CUNY admission  
18 procedures, college prep programs, and financial aid  
19 systems.

20 To further promote the use of technology in the  
21 classrooms, our technical assistance provider at  
22 Literacy Assistance Center, offer training on  
23 Google's applied digital skills curriculum. This  
24 online site with ready to use video lessons teach  
25 digital skills that have immediate real life

1  
2 application. CBO staff learned the basics of Google  
3 Drive focusing on why it is useful for adult  
4 education and explore the Google's applied digital  
5 skills lessons.

6 We have partnered with MOIA to discuss ways to  
7 promote We Speak NYC. A video series produced by  
8 MOIA and CUNY to help English language learners  
9 improve their language skills while learning about  
10 city services and their rights. MOIA staff presented  
11 We Speak NYC to literacy providers. A joint  
12 professional training session best practices around  
13 immigration of the video into English language  
14 classes has been offered to providers.

15 During the COVID-19 pandemic, adult literacy  
16 programs quickly transitioned into the realm of  
17 distance learning. We are grateful to the literacy  
18 providers for their tremendous effort during this  
19 challenging time period and we thank them for their  
20 commitment and flexibility.

21 All teachers and students will require to adjust  
22 to new online learning and the teaching platform,  
23 such as Zoom and Google platform. In order to  
24 facilitate the transition, DYCD's staff in concert  
25 with our technical assistance provider, provided



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timely training to CBO staff on effective use of various online platforms to engage students. DYCD also organized several meetings where providers discussed successes and challenges of remote learning, which offered them the opportunity to exchange ideas and to share best practices and resources. Programs have quickly adapted their instruction to remote platform and provided additional one on one support through their students through phone calls, text messages, online platforms and expanded support services.

Programs are supporting students to continue their learning, stay connected to a community and access essential information and services.

Although the pandemic has brought new challenges to our students and programs, requiring them to adapt to a new way of learning, DYCD maintains our commitment to adult learners. We have received positive feedback about the use of remote learning tools in adult literacy programs. Some providers have reported that some students who previously frozen their participation when classes moved online. We have also seen that some families found it easier

1  
2 to fit the classes into their schedules when they  
3 were able to join programs from their homes.

4 We will continue to work with our providers to  
5 best accommodate the learning needs of our students.  
6 Once again, thank you for holding this hearing today.  
7 We look forward to continuing to work with the City  
8 Council on promoting adult literacy.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
10 I will now turn it over to questions from Chair  
11 Menchaca followed by Chair Rose. Panelists, please  
12 stay unmuted if possible during this question and  
13 answer period. Thank you. Chair Menchaca, please  
14 begin.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. I want to  
16 start with one question and then let Chair Rose have  
17 questions and then members and then come back and do  
18 a deeper dive. And I really want to say, first thank  
19 you to the Administration DYCD and the Mayor's  
20 Office. We partnered in a very strong way to commit  
21 funding in this last really difficult Fiscal Year and  
22 that totaled to about \$9.8 million for adult literacy  
23 as an initiative. 6.4 of that was on the Mayor's  
24 side for funding and I believe that there was an  
25 increase in slots actually at the Mayor's side for

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2 literacy. And so, I just want to make sure that we  
3 can get from you all the breakdown of that because it  
4 is an important thing to say thank you when the  
5 Administration you know, steps up and does the right  
6 thing, we want to say thank you to that and I think  
7 it is going to set us up for larger discussions about  
8 how we think about resources. And we believe that  
9 there were more slots at the end of the day in this  
10 last fiscal year than previous years from the  
11 Administration and we would like to know if those  
12 were already allocated and if other members of the  
13 community are still able to kind of access those  
14 funds that were allocated for slots?

15 COLETTE SAMMAN: I am sorry, I am a little  
16 confused by your question. Are you asking what our  
17 budgeted amount was? Are you asking about the LIT  
18 funding?

19 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, so let me just put  
20 it straight.

21 COLETTE SAMMAN: Yeah.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: We want to fund classes.  
23 Students and classes. That's what we want. We saw  
24 that the Administration funded more seats. Can you  
25 confirm that, so we can say thank you?

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COLETTE SAMMAN: I think it's - okay, let me see if I can answer your question if it is satisfactory, if not, Alex if you want to tag on as well to answer this.

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So, yes, we received funding and we have done our best to make sure that we are everywhere and anywhere we possibly could be. Prior to COVID-19, we were you know, rocking and rolling in all places, 75 sites across the city. We had a really high participation average between 3,000 to 3,500 learners a year. That does not include the people because we did a huge digital upgrade last summer to our website, which then made it much more interactive and people globally could access our website. Take the quizzes, do different things. They were not - they watched the episodes. They were not receiving live instruction but they were certainly able to do a lot more than they were by just you know, watching an episode and then essentially not having any backup curriculum.

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CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah, sorry Commissioner, can I pause you there?

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COLETTE SAMMAN: Sure.

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2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: I am not talking about We  
3 Speak. We Speak is not a classroom -

4 COLETTE SAMMAN: Oh, so strictly DYCD.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah, sorry, yeah, I am  
6 really talking about the seats and the allocation of  
7 funding towards those seats and if we can have DYCD  
8 confirm those numbers, I think it is something to  
9 celebrate for now.

10 COLETTE SAMMAN: Sure.

11 RONG ZHANG: First of all, let me begin by  
12 thanking the Council for your support especially at  
13 this time. You know, we are very adult literacy  
14 community and DYCD are very grateful that given the  
15 current situation, we not only kept our base contract  
16 funding intact, we got additional funds which we know  
17 as expansion funds.

18 Yes, we have already allocated those funds. We  
19 go the go ahead to start the contract amendment  
20 process. And we are expending programs by serving an  
21 additional 5,000 students with our base contracts.  
22 And also, there is about 40 some programs designated  
23 through the City Council and there is an additional  
24 2,000 to 3,000 people that is all together you know,  
25

1  
2 we are talking about 7,000, 8,000 people to be served  
3 under the additional funding.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, thank you. I just  
5 want to say again thank you. I think that's good  
6 news and that I think is going to really build a base  
7 of discussion as we move forward to the next budget  
8 discussions. I will hand it over to Chair Rose.

9 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Thank you Chair Menchaca.  
10 Assistant Commissioner Zhang, in Fiscal 2020 Mayor's  
11 Management Report, DYCD reported steady growth in the  
12 number of participants in DYCD funded English  
13 literacy programs since FY 2016. In fact, by FY20,  
14 the number of participants had doubled to 15,631 from  
15 7,582 in Fiscal Year '16. Do these numbers reflect  
16 unique participants and there is no target enrollment  
17 listed for FY21. With the FY21 increased investment  
18 in adult literacy classes, does DYCD expect a further  
19 increase of program enrollees in Fiscal Year '21?

20 RONG ZHANG: Well, FY'21 based on what I have  
21 right now, we anticipate to serve about 13,000  
22 students, 13,000 students this year. I believe the  
23 number has come down a little bit compared to the  
24 previous year because the 40 some awards from the  
25 Council funded site, had across the board a 15

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percent reduction as I understand. So, you know, based on our estimate, so the numbers will come down accordingly.

CHAIRPERSON ROSE: How does the growth in the student enrollment over the last four fiscal years relate to the waiting lists that were held by adult literacy providers and have those lists been depleted? Do they remain stable or are they continuing to grow?

RONG ZHANG: I believe that you know, there is always people that are on the waiting list or waiting to get into those programs. You know, the need is always there. You know the services, you know, the service that's been provided obviously are not meeting the huge demands out there but you know, DYCD in collaboration with our partners, other literacy providing entities and the Council, you know, we have been doing our best you know to expand our programs to provide services to more people. This has always to do with availability of funds. And also, you know, the providers capacity.

CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Given the fiscal forecast, will the city continue to be flexible with the contract reimbursements and if the work, you know,

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2 goes beyond the original plan and costs exceed  
3 expectations, will DYCD be flexible?

4 RONG ZHANG: Well, I am glad you asked that.  
5 Flexibility has been something you know that we are  
6 well aware of and we emphasize a lot during these  
7 difficult times and you know, we work within – of  
8 course we work within our budgets. CBO's work within  
9 their budgets but we are flexible in terms of how  
10 they spend the money. For example, during the  
11 pandemic, CBO's needed to you know, purchase tablets,  
12 laptops, whatever equipment needed to help students  
13 access services and we proposed this and we give them  
14 special consideration. In normal times, we would be  
15 more careful with those but during these times, we  
16 you know, gave them permission to do this.

17 And just to give you an example, I know our CDBG,  
18 the federal funding programs and the equipment  
19 usually under that funding source is sort of limited  
20 but given the current situation, you know, equipment  
21 purchase under that has been loosened and we, you  
22 know, gave them special dispensation to by those  
23 equipment to continue learning and services.

24 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Especially during COVID-19, it  
25 is really critical that this already underserved



1  
2 population has access to the technology that they  
3 need to continue with their literacy programming.

4       So, I am glad to hear that there is some  
5 flexibility. The need is great and so, I just want  
6 to make sure that we are you know, not putting any or  
7 complicating any of the barriers that you know, they  
8 already face. We are talking about you know, people  
9 who have been traditionally underserved and have you  
10 know, suffered systemic disparities.

11       So, I am glad to hear that we are working on  
12 that. And one of the issues that we have discussed  
13 you know, frequently with DYCD is the portal and  
14 access to information. So, does DYCD assist  
15 contracting organizations with advertising adult  
16 literacy programming and if so, you know, how are you  
17 doing that and if not, you know, why? And then I  
18 want to know the Discover DYCD portal provides  
19 information of DYCD contracted providers but what  
20 other information about these programs exist for  
21 individuals with low digital literacy?

22       RONG ZHANG: DYCD certainly helps you know, with  
23 the dissemination of program information. You know,  
24 even people necessary information to access our  
25 programs in all the communities. Our website you

1  
2 know, has all program areas, what they do and the  
3 list of providers contact information. Discover DYCD  
4 has been you know, updated again and again and there  
5 is necessary information for people and the language  
6 we use in there are you know, plain language you  
7 know, for English speakers and also, programs are  
8 already using the system to apply, to submit  
9 applications on line. So, that is a big help in this  
10 process during this time.

11 DYCD's Youth Connect, is a popular hotline. It  
12 is out there; people always call about literacy  
13 programs and they always pass on information through  
14 that venue. And also, 311 has our information too.  
15 So, there are various ways people can get information  
16 through the city about the services out there. But  
17 what I will say is that, really it's really our  
18 providers programs that promote the programs. And  
19 they are in the communities, they are using whatever  
20 they think would you know would be easy, accessible  
21 and best accessible for their participants.

22 For example, some of them use local TV, use local  
23 newspapers, different languages. You know in our  
24 days, especially you know now, they have turned to  
25 social media by using Facebook and to advertise,

1  
2 promote their programs and as I understand that they  
3 are actually doing a great job reaching out to  
4 people, especially you know, after the first few  
5 months following March.

6 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Does Discover DYCD though  
7 advertise beyond the city websites? Because how do  
8 individuals know to look for this portal to find you  
9 know, a DYCD contracted programs?

10 RONG ZHANG: Well, DYCD contracts with about  
11 probably 3,000 contracts and the services of  
12 providers throughout the community is in the city.  
13 You know, programs all know about Discover DYCD and  
14 they are expected to use that to process applications  
15 in addition to you know, walk-ins in their community  
16 -

17 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Yeah, Assistant Commissioner,  
18 I am talking about you know, how does Discover DYCD  
19 advertise beyond city websites or do you?

20 RONG ZHANG: I need to find out about how that's  
21 done and if it is done. If we can get back to you on  
22 that.

23 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Yeah, because if someone is  
24 unaware of that portal, then you know, it's sort of a  
25

1  
2 point about how they access you know, these programs.  
3 These you know, DYCD contracted programs.

4 I have just one more question before I turn over  
5 but I wanted to know, what types of evaluations of  
6 adult literacy program contracts does DYCD conduct  
7 and would you share them with the Committee?

8 RONG ZHANG: You mean, evaluation of contracts?

9 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Yes, of the adult literacy  
10 contracts.

11 RONG ZHANG: Okay, you know, we are a contracting  
12 agency. We, as you know, that we conduct program  
13 reviews of site visits all the time. During those  
14 visits, you know, we have conversations with CBO  
15 program staff, program directors, teachers and  
16 participants. And we make sure that they comply with  
17 contract expectations, they provide services as  
18 expected and we also have, in all programs, class  
19 schedules.

20 So, we observe classrooms you know, exchange  
21 ideas with staff and if necessary provide support and  
22 staff training and we work with our TA provider very  
23 closely in that respect and our TA provider as you  
24 all know, the Literacy Assistant Center, worked with  
25 programs very closely providing services.

1  
2 We also do outside support and we of course, you  
3 know, follow each visit, each program review. CBO's  
4 receive a report from us, you know detailing our  
5 findings. You know, encouraging continued strength  
6 and working on weaknesses through support and TA.  
7 And of course, there is an annual program evaluation  
8 which is you know, used to be called Vendex  
9 evaluation. So, that basically looks at you know,  
10 service level, administration, fiscal integrity and  
11 all that. So, yeah, programs are monitored closely.

12 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: And I would just ask if the  
13 Committee, if the Youth Services Committee could get  
14 copies of those reports?

15 RONG ZHANG: You mean site visits reports?

16 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Yes.

17 RONG ZHANG: Certainly. We can share some of the  
18 site visits reports. We can send those to you.

19 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Well, those are the evaluation  
20 reports of the sites.

21 RONG ZHANG: Yeah.

22 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Okay, alright. Thank you  
23 Chair Menchaca.

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Rose. I will  
3 now turn it over to Council Member Chin for  
4 questions.

5

COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you. My first  
6 question is to DYCD Deputy Commissioner. You know,  
7 during the COVID, I am just comparing in terms of  
8 what, because I Chair the Committee on Aging and  
9 there is like you know, over you know 249 senior  
10 centers. So, when Council Member Chair Rose asked  
11 about flexibility, I wanted to know like, did DYCD in  
12 the beginning send out a notice to all of the  
13 providers asking them or giving them guidance in  
14 terms of you know, turning from a you know, in-  
15 classroom setting to remote learning? You know, how  
16 to go about that, the requirement and also, were  
17 there like guidance given into like their needs for  
18 equipment for their students? How, you know, how can  
19 they use some of their budget?

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So, was that information provided in the  
beginning to help them transition from in-person  
learning to remote learning?

23

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RONG ZHANG: Sure, thank you for the question.  
It is a great question. You know, as the virus  
situation worsened back in early March, we already

1  
2 anticipated that you know, the closing of the program  
3 might happen. So, you know, the last in-person  
4 meeting in early March, we specifically devoted  
5 almost the whole meeting just to discuss how we can  
6 you know, transition to online services, to online  
7 instruction to continue services. There was a lot of  
8 discussion as I mentioned in my testimony, you know,  
9 DYCD has always placed priority and emphasis on  
10 integrating technology in the classrooms. Back in  
11 the beginning of Fiscal '20 through LAC we work with  
12 Google and we got a pilot program done to actually  
13 teach people how to use Google Drive Google  
14 Classrooms to you know, assist the in-person classes.  
15 In that pilot, if I remember correctly, you know  
16 there were four series of training, 60 people from  
17 close to 20, a little over 20 programs actually  
18 participated in that summer.

19       So, that really prepared you know, our programs  
20 for that concept of online teaching. And you know,  
21 as we actually was just about to work with – continue  
22 to work with Google expand that, you know, the  
23 pandemic struck and we got side tracked on that. But  
24 you know, programs, I really would have to shout to  
25 our programs and participant staff who really made

1  
2 efforts. Did a quick transition to distance learning  
3 and remote services. DYCD from the get go provided  
4 guidance in terms of continued budgeting, continued  
5 contracting and continued programming. Our Chief of  
6 Staff was our designated point person for COVID  
7 issues and I remember just you know, within the first  
8 week of the closure, we had our first providers  
9 meeting on Web X. Our Chief of Staff was there to  
10 basically explain you know the city's general  
11 guidelines on continued services and making sure that  
12 CBO's contract intact. There was no layoff, there  
13 was no closing of programs. You know, there is  
14 continued funding.

15       And we gave guidance to programs in terms of  
16 instruction under the new circumstances. You know,  
17 for example, we had to you know, waive certain  
18 requirements to ensure services will continue. One  
19 of the things was as you all know, we administered  
20 standardized testing for literacy programs for  
21 placement and progress measurement and that test was  
22 ministered in person. But you know, given the  
23 situation, we couldn't do that and we had to you  
24 know, waive that like other literacy providers. To  
25 waive that and to give CBO's guidance that they



1  
2 should you know, do their best to assess their  
3 students however they can and making sure the  
4 students are still placed properly to receive  
5 services. And that's what the CBO's did and we  
6 continued to give them guidance throughout the time.

7 In May, we gave them guidance on summer time.

8 You know, summer time was a very good time for  
9 programs to sort of relax a little bit, focus on you  
10 know, staff development training to get ready for the  
11 fall programming.

12 And you know, we do have programs that still  
13 continue summer programming and the services but  
14 there was a lot of staff development training given  
15 to them. Just DYCD, we convened at least four best  
16 practice sharing and we call it, Teachers Share. You  
17 know, providers actually served as panelists on  
18 those. Shared what they did during the last six  
19 months in terms of using different platforms to  
20 effectively engage students. The LAC, our TA  
21 provider, worked with providers closely to, providing  
22 TA services online, as groups and also, individually  
23 to programs.

24

25

1  
2           So, our programs have expressed a lot of  
3 gratitude to our continued support for that continued  
4 support.

5           COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: That's very good. I am  
6 glad to hear that. Can you also tell me, like I know  
7 you gave an example about the flexibility of  
8 providers using certain funding to buy equipment.  
9 How many of that requests came in or did you also let  
10 the provider know that the flexibility is available.  
11 That if their student needs equipment to continue the  
12 learning that they can use some of the funding to do  
13 that.

14           RONG ZHANG: Yes, I mean, you know, we know how  
15 hard it was and we never really have enough money to  
16 you know, distribute devices like other entities into  
17 our programs but we certainly, you know working  
18 within our budgets, we allowed the flexibility and we  
19 let the CBO's know that they can certainly buy  
20 equipment for students for staff to continue  
21 services. We actually, we also ask them – of course  
22 we ask them to indicate that it is COVID-19 related,  
23 so then we can expedite our review and approval  
24 process working with our office.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you. I have a  
3 question for the Deputy Commissioner from MOIA. I  
4 think that in your testimony, we hear about you know,  
5 all these different entities that provides English  
6 language classes. DOE, CUNY, the library, all the  
7 providers from DYCD. Is MOIA the agency that does  
8 the coordination or who is in the Mayor's Office that  
9 actually, in the Administration that actually has a  
10 comprehensive picture of all the funding's and all  
11 the services that are being offered to immigrant  
12 population, to adult learner. You know that we have  
13 all these programs available. Like, is there any  
14 kind of you know, coordination to know how many  
15 people we are serving? Like the library, who do they  
16 report to when they do English classes?

17 COLETTE SAMMAN: So, I can get back to you on who  
18 exactly is in charge of the whole citywide  
19 coordination and collection - MOIA is in the  
20 conversation of its own. [LOST AUDIO 1:20:59] Not as  
21 much as DYCD. So, we oversee We Speak and in my  
22 testimony, I spoke about how we partner with  
23 different organizations in a variety of ways. So,  
24 via We Speak, we handle all of the coordination that  
25 the CBO's and with the libraries where We Speak

1  
2 classes are being conducted. We also train all of  
3 the volunteers on how to run a We Speak course and  
4 facilitate our curriculum.

5 My internet bandwidth is saying it is low. Can  
6 you guys still hear me? Just a thumbs up, am I good?  
7 I don't know my internet seems to be going, yeah we  
8 are good, okay.

9 So, that's the We Speak piece. In addition to  
10 that, we coordinate with CUNY a lot. CUNY you know,  
11 has expertise in ESOL curriculum and they assist us a  
12 lot in the video production. So, we work with them.  
13 We also do a lot of support to our partner agencies  
14 that Alex can speak to in a moment.

15 We are involved in a new pilot project with new  
16 women in New York which leave tailored our curriculum  
17 to directly impact workforce development with the  
18 evaluation outcomes look like and [LOST AUDIO  
19 1:22:25] that's something new for us but we are very  
20 excited. Very specific to workforce and allowing  
21 these women to build their literacy skills and how  
22 that improves job attainment.

23 Alex, did you want to speak a little bit more to  
24 potentially what the birds eye view is?

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ALEXANDRA RUIZ: Yeah, thank you Colette. So, just to echo what Colette was saying. So, these would be the support that we provide which is through our curriculum. We work with community based organizations, we work with libraries, we work with universities and we provide their educators with curriculum that covers city services. And coupled with that, we also offer in person classes and we do that by training volunteers that are placed at different CBO sites.

And so, that's the core service at We Speak NYC. We partner closely with CUNY to ensure that our content is covering materials and topics that are relevant. Most recently, we partnered with the Department of Health for example, or we created materials on led. Or entire remote curriculum has been on COVID-19, which I think is a testament to the ever green content that we created and the investment that has been made in the website as well as the second season of We Speak NYC, which covers topics like food security, workforce development, education, etc.

COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you. I mean, like, there are a lot of I mean, from your testimony, there

1  
2 is a lot of information out there and I think you  
3 know Chair Rose asked about you know, like, getting  
4 information so that people will know about it. I  
5 don't think everybody knows about it. I don't think  
6 that I know all the programs that you talk about and  
7 that's what the question that I was asking in terms  
8 of some overall coordination from the Administration.

9 I know you know, whether there is a Deputy Mayor  
10 you know, that kind of have an oversight of all of  
11 this and that would really help kind of put more  
12 emphasis on the importance of the ESOL you know,  
13 learning, adult learners and so that pulling all the  
14 resources together versus you know, there are so many  
15 different programs operating out there and it just  
16 kind of like sends a signal that this is an important  
17 population that the city really has to pay attention  
18 to. And I think that that is what you know, we want  
19 to see. You know, more coordination and you know,  
20 more kind of a comprehensive review. So that when we  
21 advocate for funding in the budget, it should not be  
22 so difficult to get the Administration to provide the  
23 funding every year, you know, for these classes for  
24 our ESOL learners. Thank you, thank you Chair.

COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH  
COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES

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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member. I  
am now going to turn it back to Chair Menchaca for  
further questions.

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6

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Harbani and I  
want to start with it is actually a follow up to  
Council Member Chin's question about the services and  
a lot of what the Council Adult Literacy Initiative  
is about is funding the classroom experiences.

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Deputy Commissioner Samman, can you talk a little  
bit about whether or not We Speak is accredited as an  
educational experience that moves people through like  
an adult literacy education program?

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COLETTE SAMMAN: We are not accredited. We are a  
volunteer led curriculum. We have you know, worked  
with CUNY and their ESOL department to develop our  
curriculum. So, you know, and our model relies on  
the fact that we are in the community and that we do  
think a little bit different to really meet the needs  
of all kinds of community members. It is not a  
traditional classroom. It is held in a variety of  
spaces with variety of ages. However, we have  
outstanding numbers and we have won Emmy's, so we  
feel good about what we are doing.

1  
2 Alex, anything else to add on accreditation. You  
3 are on mute Al.

4 ALEXANDRA RUIZ: Yeah, thank you. So, I would  
5 just add you know, We Speak is supplemental. I think  
6 one of the things that this particular hearing  
7 started with is with the acknowledgement that there  
8 is huge waiting lists, so We Speak provides an  
9 opportunity for students to be able to practice their  
10 English, outside of the traditional classroom  
11 setting.

12 So, we work closely with organizations that are  
13 accredited. We provide additional opportunities to  
14 practice and we also help build the capacity of  
15 organizations who can't provide that additional time  
16 by placing volunteers and providing curricula that  
17 covers really important issues that immigrants, that  
18 communities need to be aware of.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you for that and I  
20 appreciate the difference. I think it is an  
21 important part of the conversation. I will say that  
22 what we would rather do is put more funding in  
23 addressing the waiting list than something else and I  
24 think that that's the push and policy if the Council  
25 and I think that's going to be important as we talk



1  
2 about budget as we move forward into the budget  
3 season.

4       There is a lot of excitement for We Speak and I  
5 get that. What I want to know, what MOIA is doing to  
6 really connect community members, immigrants, people  
7 who engage MOIA on multiple levels for different  
8 reasons to participate in adult literacy accredited  
9 classes. What are you doing to crowd build for  
10 those?

11       ALEXANDRA RUIZ: Yeah, I just want to say that  
12 you know, I think We Speak is multifaceted and I want  
13 to acknowledge that creating curriculum for educators  
14 that covers critical services is extremely important.  
15 As a former executive director of a nonprofit that  
16 focused on ESOL, I know how challenging it is to find  
17 high quality free ESOL content.

18       So, I just want to acknowledge that and to your  
19 question, I will just say that more than ever we have  
20 seen how critical it has been to have a website that  
21 provides self-guided learning at a time where there  
22 isn't classroom space.

23       So, even in the first quarter of Fiscal '21, we  
24 have seen double the use of our website because  
25 people are hungry for content that is not being

1  
2 offered in classroom spaces. So, while I acknowledge  
3 that absolutely credential programs are critical, I  
4 don't want to dismiss or diminish the impact that We  
5 Speak vis-a vis offering tools to the field, as well  
6 as providing really important support for CBO's.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: I, and I get that too. I  
8 guess what we're trying to do in this adult literacy  
9 conversation is understand the need for more adult  
10 literacy space and when we are in a budget crunch, we  
11 got to make decisions about where we place funding  
12 and I think we did a great job this year to do that  
13 and this is not to diminish anything that is coming  
14 out of We Speak. But adult literacy class space is  
15 where we want to get people to and I think, I am  
16 asking MOIA, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs,  
17 what they are doing to push people to accredited  
18 classes. And I haven't heard that you are doing  
19 anything about that.

20 COLETTE SAMMAN: Yeah, I needed to be unmuted,  
21 thank you. What we are continuously working with,  
22 yeah, we are continuously working with partners  
23 across the Administration to both build out more  
24 literacy. Obviously, we would love more literacy  
25

1  
2 funding. We would love to see more people be able to  
3 access free education and as well as ESOL classes.

4       So, as an office, we are not necessarily pushing  
5 an accreditation agenda but we are certainly pushing  
6 adult literacy, how important it is. Partnering  
7 wherever we can, working with the – and you know,  
8 another thing to recognize is that we are also trying  
9 to leverage our position to work with varying office  
10 around the city to see how we can help bridge the  
11 digital divide. Making sure people can access what  
12 is out there, right already, so that's a big  
13 component to.

14       ALEXANDRA RUIZ: And I will just add that We  
15 Speak tends to be a pipeline for entering other  
16 accredited programs. So, again, as I mentioned, many  
17 students who can't access classes, enter We Speak,  
18 they learn about different accredited programs,  
19 including CUNY's program and therefore are introduced  
20 to those programs vis-à-vis their first engagement  
21 with We Speak.

22       CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, this is very  
23 concerning. We are going to move onto more questions  
24 but I don't see a lot of plug in to adult literacy  
25 accredited classes. I think that's been a long time

1  
2 problem. I think there is a lot of focus on We  
3 Speak. I think we got to fix that and I want to work  
4 with you to try to figure out how to do that. I hope  
5 you can stay to hear from the CBO's, who I think are  
6 going to offer some ideas on how to make that happen,  
7 but that's the goal. We want people to go school,  
8 accredited experiences, so that they can move up in  
9 their proficiency and be able to get that high school  
10 equivalency.

11 That is a lot of times the goal.

12 COLETTE SAMMAN: I would just like to say one last  
13 thing on that. I appreciate that and I think we are  
14 in agreement that that is important but MOIA, as an  
15 office, oversees a supplemental program that leads  
16 people to that, that gives people maybe their first  
17 step at that, right.

18 And so, there is an importance and a value to a  
19 gateway as well. By all means, we agree that people  
20 should be moved into formal education, go to an  
21 accredited school. We are also, I think what Alex  
22 keeps going back to, is that we are underscoring the  
23 value here to meet people A. Where they are at in  
24 their community, where they are comfortable. Being  
25 able to reach people, particularly immigrants and new

1  
2 Americans who sometimes feel very apprehensive about  
3 accessing services in any way and making it as  
4 approachable and as welcoming and easy as possible,  
5 right. There isn't a whole bunch of paperwork  
6 anybody has to feel out, they can just show up at the  
7 library. They can show up at one of our CBO's and  
8 begin working in We Speak.

9 That doesn't mean by no means as We Speak the end  
10 will be all for anybody, right. It's a gateway, it's  
11 a path, it also is a supplement. There are people  
12 that do speak English pretty well. This only  
13 bolsters that for them.

14 So, I think we're talking a little bit about two  
15 different things. One that we control and we oversee  
16 and that we have made a real dent in immigrant  
17 communities with and the other is, where is this  
18 going and what is the city and the Administration  
19 doing to try and open up more opportunities for  
20 accredited learning with these populations and I  
21 think we can get back to you with that but that's not  
22 something that we oversee.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And I think that's the  
24 concern that these are two different things and what  
25 we are asking for is an adult literacy initiative and

1  
2 vision. And that's not what we are getting and we  
3 can work through that but I think I want to move over  
4 to the next question.

5 So, we understand that prior to COVID, the  
6 pandemic, one of the primary constituent requests of  
7 the city's info desk was for a seat in an adult  
8 literacy classroom. So, how does MOIA route that  
9 call? What referrals are made?

10 This is getting to the question that I am asking  
11 before but this is now in response to COVID. How did  
12 MOIA route those calls and how are they doing that  
13 today?

14 ALEXANDRA RUIZ: So, generally we receive  
15 referrals and we receive referrals from different  
16 places, right. Specifically, when we get a referral  
17 through the info-desk, we have amazing staff members  
18 that equip that line. That are tasked with  
19 connecting with partners who do have availability and  
20 when they don't, as Colette mentioned, we do offer  
21 the opportunity to engage with We Speak.

22 For those that, if we don't have any - if  
23 organizations that we are connected to don't have the  
24 ability to place them in an ESOL classroom.

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CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, how does MOIA shape its programs based on constituent calls and requests?

So, whether the info-desk or MOIA, how does it shape the programs based on calls? So, whether it is at the info-desk or on the constituent services hotline?

COLETTE SAMMAN: We take all inquiries, all questions, all feedback very seriously. When we hear any kind of complaint or something isn't working, we immediately address it. That goes for IDNYC, whether we receive an email that somebody can't access the card or something didn't work, they couldn't get an appointment to Action NYC and someone is not able to get through the hotline. The same goes for We Speak. We do everything we can. We actually have a team of people outside of the info-desk, constituent services team that does lots of that work with the income calls.

IDNYC has its own customer service line. We have the info-desk. So, we have tried to build out a variety of ways that we have teams of people that address these concerns and also bring feedback right to the leaders of these programs to try and make sure that both the New Yorker is address and that we are

1  
2 directly speaking with them but also, that the  
3 program can you know, look at it and say, oh wait,  
4 this actually isn't working. This isn't the best way  
5 to do it, let's do it this way and try. We are very  
6 flexible in our ability to adjust to what peoples  
7 needs are.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: MOIA's annual report  
9 states that 33 percent of children in mixed status  
10 families live in linguistically isolated households  
11 which suggests that children with proficiency in such  
12 linguistically isolated households may bear a  
13 disproportionate level of family responsibility, as I  
14 kind of spoke to my own experience, as the only  
15 proficient English speaker at home.

16 How does MOIA use this data to inform into adult  
17 literacy related programming, vision, leadership  
18 policies?

19 COLETTE SAMMAN: Alex, do you want to start on  
20 literacy and I can speak the larger question?

21 ALEXANDRA RUIZ: Yeah, I guess I will start by  
22 saying that a lot of We Speaks content, right  
23 addresses some of the biggest challenges that parents  
24 have to face.



1  
2       So, our curricula is very much about helping  
3 parents navigate difficult situations including how  
4 to navigate the DOE, right. And so, we have an  
5 amazing episode that talks parents through what it is  
6 like to speak to a teacher and offers language for  
7 showing up to those appointments with teachers.

8       So, all of the curriculum is about empowering  
9 parents to be able to – you know, to be able to  
10 really be hero's of their story and be able to  
11 understand the services that they have access to and  
12 be able to navigate that, so that their children  
13 don't have to bear the burden. And I definitely  
14 empathize right as an immigrant who was born in  
15 Dominican Republic. I came here when I was seven  
16 years old. I definitely know what it is like to have  
17 responsibility and it is really amazing that we have  
18 a program that not only provides ESOL content but  
19 really navigates, helps navigate how parents navigate  
20 that.

21       I don't know Colette, if you want to add to that.

22       COLETTE SAMMAN: And I think as an agency, you  
23 know MOIA does lead the charge through interagency  
24 work. We work with our agency partners across the  
25 city to ensure that there are following all the local

1  
2 laws. That there is language access, that there is  
3 language line, that there are supports available. We  
4 do a lot of agency partner trainings that address all  
5 of the issues that immigrants are facing including  
6 this one.

7 So, I think that we do an excellent job working  
8 with our agency partners on a host of issues, this  
9 included.

10 ALEXANDRA RUIZ: And I will just add that we most  
11 recently partnered with the DOE to provide training  
12 for parent coordinators. So, that's another way that  
13 we ensure that information is traveling not through  
14 our content but through individuals that are working  
15 directly with immigrant families.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: How is MOIA ensuring that  
17 immigrant New Yorkers who may lack digital literacy  
18 are still able to access critical information such as  
19 the federal immigration updates.

20 The new update on Census that's going to be  
21 ending on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Service eligibility, everything  
22 that we offer in this city. How is MOIA -

23 COLETTE SAMMAN: Moya has a very dedicated staff;  
24 I will say that who work all of the time. An  
25 outreach team, we partner with all of the agency

1  
2 outreach teams to disseminate information. We host  
3 days of action. We even in this post-COVID world  
4 have done tons of work with the Census team outdoors  
5 in a safe way to try and get information to people.

6 On all of the different things that have come  
7 down from the federal government, we have  
8 continuously worked like a very small army to make  
9 sure that both digitally, on paper, outreach,  
10 different agencies, list serves, emails to agencies,  
11 updating our curriculum in our various program,  
12 whether it is the KYR program and putting slides in  
13 any which way that we could try to get people the  
14 information.

15 MOIA has worked across the Administration to  
16 ensure that people get this information including  
17 working with DOE to make sure that the children have  
18 it to bring home in a folder and making sure that the  
19 parent coordinators are you know, updating parents on  
20 various things that would be critical for them to  
21 know in the moment.

22 Our rapid response to the last four years has 24  
23 to 48 hours we are getting the communities  
24 information and a lot of it is done through social  
25 media and maybe on our website but a large percent of

1  
2 that is done through grassroots, on the ground  
3 outreach to communities.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: So, I just kind of want to  
5 point that I think that everything that you just laid  
6 out are really great approaches and those are  
7 important, especially all the analog stuff in person  
8 but that doesn't address any of the digital divide  
9 and the digital literacy issues that I think Chair  
10 Rose and I spoke to in our opening statements.

11 COLETTE SAMMAN: I agree but your question was,  
12 how do we make sure that people who do not have  
13 access to that or cannot access digitally get  
14 information. So, by no means are we relying on that.  
15 The digital divide is big and we are - I said it in  
16 my testimony, we have noticed it probably more than  
17 most because of We Speak but also from all of our  
18 other programs that COVID-19 has left a large portion  
19 of the population out of the equation. This is no  
20 more obvious than what the Department of Education  
21 and student learners. This would apply to adult  
22 learners as well.

23 Particularly, why the Assistant Commissioner of  
24 DYCD noted as well as one of the advocates that you  
25

1  
2 know, these are often the first people who have to go  
3 back to work.

4       And so, we are working closely with the CTO's  
5 office to see where and what can be done to both  
6 address the large broadband disparity. This is not  
7 just about getting people devices, right. There is a  
8 lack of internet in the city and how that's being  
9 addressed. The Administration did put a lot of  
10 money, I can pull up my paper, so that I am accurate,  
11 last May in making sure that there was technology  
12 given to seniors, technology given to NYCHA. Trying  
13 to get low cost and accessible internet to NYCHA in  
14 various locations where there was none.

15       So, Alex and the We Speak team have been working  
16 very closely in the past few months with the CTO's  
17 office to see how we are going to really attack this  
18 in the next three months as it relates to immigrant  
19 communities, what can be done. And our Commissioner,  
20 as well as other Commissioners are very interested in  
21 potential private partnerships to try and get people  
22 the actual technology, right. It is one thing to  
23 have internet, it is another thing to be able to  
24 connect with the device.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah, and that's the core  
3 of the question. How do you get that information and  
4 that's digital divide, it's technology, it's  
5 infrastructure and it doesn't sound like there is a  
6 plan for that and I really appreciate that MOIA can  
7 see things probably more intensely because of the  
8 community. And so, I want to say thank you to that.

9 What we are looking for is what is MOIA going to  
10 do about it and I think that's that ultimate issue.  
11 We want to work with you to figure out what those  
12 initiatives could be for the immigrant community.  
13 That's what this discussion is trying to focus on.

14 ALEXANDRA RUIZ: Chair Menchaca, if I may, I just  
15 don't want this to get lost, right. We, MOIA, not  
16 only have an amazing outreach team but we work with  
17 many of the community based organizations that you  
18 work with to provide Know Your Rights Forums. They  
19 get updated information almost on a daily basis from  
20 our staff. On top of that, we talked a little bit  
21 about We Speak, our partnership with the DOE. We  
22 distributed the Immigration Resource Guide to over  
23 300,000 people, right.

24 So, we are using mixed methods approach. That  
25 involved working with community based organizations

1  
2 as well as working through the channels that the city  
3 has to provide printed information because we know  
4 how limited the breach is.

5       So, we would be happy to continue to partner with  
6 you specifically to make sure that no stone goes  
7 unturned, as they say and reaching as many people as  
8 possible but I really want to make sure that people  
9 know that our amazing partners are on the ground.  
10 Our outreach staff is on the ground and we are  
11 working with city agencies across the board to get  
12 printed materials in areas where we know there is a  
13 gap.

14       CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And thank you to the  
15 staff. Everyone is working hard and this is not  
16 about them, this is about the infrastructure that  
17 does not exist today and that will always present a  
18 gap.

19       That is what we are trying to highlight. That is  
20 what we are trying to focus on and remove from this  
21 barriers. Otherwise, we are going to have the same  
22 issue over and over again.

23       So, let's move onto the next question because  
24 even if we can get folks engaged in digital  
25 communication, we have some issues around the safety

1  
2 of that communication through these outreach teams  
3 that you are talking about. We have concerns around  
4 digital privacy of personal identifying information  
5 that keeps immigrant New Yorkers from accessing a lot  
6 of these initiatives and programs and from We Speak  
7 to Adult Literacy classes.

8 So, what has MOIA done to combat these issues  
9 that are also concerns?

10 ALEXANDRA RUIZ: Are you speaking about privacy?

11 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah, this is about  
12 privacy.

13 ALEXANDRA RUIZ: Go ahead Colette, I am sorry.

14 COLETTE SAMMAN: Go ahead Alex.

15 ALEXANDRA RUIZ: Yeah, I was just going to say,  
16 we work very closely with the Chief Privacy Officer.  
17 I think We Speak is a little bit different because we  
18 don't have contracting providers but when it comes to  
19 our program providers, which include Action NYC and  
20 others, we have very specific privacy protocols that  
21 we follow to ensure that information that's being  
22 collected is safeguarded.

23 I think when it comes to We Speak; we don't  
24 collect information specifically because we are very  
25 mindful of challenges that are had when collecting



1  
2 personal information. So, I will just say that and I  
3 don't know Colette if you want to add anything to  
4 that.

5 COLETTE SAMMAN: No, I was going to say that and  
6 you know, Council Member Menchaca, that privacy is  
7 something that we take very seriously at IDNYC as  
8 well as at MOIA. So, we have left, as Alex said  
9 before, no stone unturned. We absolutely don't want  
10 to create any privacy issues for any immigrant New  
11 Yorker. We also do not want to for there to be  
12 another barrier. Why somebody wouldn't come to a  
13 class or wouldn't access a service because they are  
14 afraid that potentially this could expose them in  
15 some way.

16 So, with that being said, with all of our  
17 programs, there are an enormous amount of privacy  
18 provisions, so that we don't hold anybody's personal  
19 identifying information. We make sure that their  
20 immigration status is not collected in all of our  
21 programs citywide. That's a priority. So, I am not  
22 sure what the concern is but if you want to expand on  
23 it, I am sure I can address that concern  
24 particularly.

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CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Well, I think we are going to have to move on to some more questions but I think this is a big concern. I think engaging your Chief Privacy Officer is not enough. I think you putting something in a pamphlet is not enough. We are talking about really changing hearts and minds on the ground that are terrified. That are not filling out the Census. We have not seen a real shift in change and the question is, who is responsible for that?

And the Mayor's Office that holds so much of what we are trying to do is at the core and center of that.

So, we are going to move on. I want to talk about really what supports MOIA providing immigrant parents who may face the digital literacy barriers. So, I really want to focus on parents and the language barriers that they experience and all of the things that are happening around the schools. How are we thinking about this? And I will give you an example, a lot of the PTA's in my district are calling me about more adult literacy programming that can happen within their school to help bridge that digital literacy gap.

1  
2 We heard from the first panelist, talk  
3 specifically about that. What is MOIA doing to  
4 support parents in this time?

5 COLETTE SAMMAN: So, from the beginning of the  
6 pandemic and when we grappled with all the things  
7 that everyone had to quickly shift to, we provided  
8 workshops. We held about ten in total helping people  
9 navigate how to get on Zoom. How to access some of  
10 these programs, software sorry.

11 And you know, through We Speak, which this is  
12 another great example as to why We Speak being as  
13 formal and sort of a gateway is, we are able to and  
14 we were able to reach many parent because they were  
15 home, caring for their children who were remote and  
16 they were able to – we had classes that we tried very  
17 hard to make sure the times were when people could  
18 actually access the service.

19 We did a time in those classes to try and help  
20 people navigate the technology and assist through  
21 that platform in getting people information and  
22 resources as to where they could if they needed  
23 additional assistance to access it.

24 Through our outreach teams, through our partners,  
25 really making sure that if people needed any kind of

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assistance, emergency, childcare, NYC Wellness.

Whatever the resources were making sure that parents were supported during this time to the best of our ability.

Alex, did you want to add anything further to that?

ALEXANDRA RUIZ: Yeah, no, you captured it. I guess I will just emphasize that the people we serve are parents. Many of them essential workers as we mentioned earlier and so, you know, through We Speak and all of the other outreach methods that we've mentioned today, we do our very best to ensure information is getting to parents in a timely fashion.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: So, I am really hearing that We Speak is a front facing initiative priority for MOIA and I appreciate that.

COLETTE SAMMAN: As well as our other programs.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: As well as the other programs as well, yes. But We Speak continues to be a kind of pivot to and I think you already know how concerned I am about that but let's talk a little bit about We Speak.

1  
2           How does MOIA ensure that linguistically relevant  
3 teachers are paired with students who could benefit  
4 from additional in language support. How does that  
5 matching happen? Does it happen?

6           ALEXANDRA RUIZ: I will just say that a lot of  
7 our facilitators are former retired individuals.  
8 Many of them who taught ESOL before.

9           I will also say that we work with the libraries  
10 right and libraries have a different way of  
11 incorporating our program where they use their own  
12 educators. We work with Fordham University for  
13 example, so we are really adding capacity yes, with  
14 volunteers. Some of which may not have that back  
15 ground, many do. But also leveraging the existing  
16 capacity that organizations have where they do have  
17 that experience.

18           I would also say that our staff are of the  
19 background. They have a lot of experience creating  
20 curricula and we also work very closely with CUNY.  
21 CUNY is our content creator. All of the content that  
22 we put out is in partnership with CUNY and definitely  
23 needs the guidelines that are necessary to ensure  
24 that we are doing what is a core of the program,  
25 which is not only building confidence, not only

1  
2 exposing people to services but also expanding the  
3 vocabulary of individuals, many of which do not have  
4 an opportunity to be part of a formal classroom.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Great, so there is no real  
6 matching with linguistically relevant teachers and  
7 students but you are building a big base of  
8 volunteers that are out there doing there doing their  
9 best and I get that.

10 ALEXANDRA RUIZ: Sorry, Chair Menchaca, that was  
11 publicly said. I just want to make sure the content  
12 is -

13 COLETTE SAMMAN: Alex, I am going to take this.  
14 We did not talk about all the volunteers doing their  
15 best. So, let's be clear, I really want to be clear.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: You are amazing, we think  
17 that. It is a very simple question.

18 COLETTE SAMMAN: I don't know that I am amazing.  
19 I can tell you We Speak is amazing and the people,  
20 the 3,400 -

21 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: We are hearing that.

22 COLETTE SAMMAN: New Yorkers who attended We  
23 Speak last year, will tell you, they had an  
24 unbelievable experience. They learned and it built  
25 their confidence.

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CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Let's talk about those new workers, can you give us the demographic breakdown of age and native language and any other demographics but I am looking for age and native language New Yorkers who are participating in We Speak. Is that something you have?

ALEXANDRA RUIZ: So, our students are between the ages of 18 and 65 with about 35 percent are within the ages of 18 and 25. And so, many of them are Spanish speaking and Chinese speaking. When we look at the demographics of the other language, they are definitely in line with the top ten languages spoken by LEP's in New York City.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Okay, thank you and if you can give us and we are going to follow up with a letter with a more detailed request for the demographics but it would be great to kind of see who are you know, the New Yorkers that are engaging in the program.

COLETTE SAMMAN: You know who else who is in the program? We have visitors from all over the world engaging in our remote program from China, Venezuela, Ecuador, India, France, Russia, Egypt, Vietnam, Iran,

1  
2 Jordan and Brazil who are all in our online remote  
3 programs. We have taken the global stage.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Wonderful, thank you.

5 Thank you for that, I really appreciate your time  
6 today and I am going to hand it back to our Committee  
7 Counsel.

8 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you. At this time, I  
9 am now going to call on Council Members in order they  
10 have used the Zoom raise hand function. If you would  
11 like to ask a question and you have not yet used the  
12 Zoom raise hand function, please do so now.

13 Okay, seeing no hands, I am just going to – Oh, I  
14 am sorry, Chair Rose.

15 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Yes, thank you. I can't find  
16 my Zoom hand function, so I am really sorry. I need  
17 an adult literacy course.

18 COLETTE SAMMAN: I find mine either, don't worry.

19 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: So, I just have one more  
20 question for DYCD. You know, last year in September  
21 we had a hearing on adult literacy and DYCD testified  
22 that there has been ongoing discussions with  
23 providers about whether programs should adopt a  
24 standard curriculum. At that time, the consensus was  
25 that they should not and they should allow for



1 flexibility. But has there been anymore – are there  
2 any updates on these discussions and has COVID-19  
3 influenced whether there should be some curricula  
4 standard, at least with respect to digital literacy?  
5

6 RONG ZHANG: Good question. You know, with the  
7 shift to the online teaching, instructors, programs,  
8 have to you know, tweak, revise their lesson plans,  
9 curriculum you know to meet the needs to continue the  
10 effective instruction.

11 Yes, we have actually – I mean, there is no  
12 discussion per se whether there is a need for  
13 curriculum or not but there is certainly a lot of  
14 talk about you know, coming up with some kind of  
15 curriculum that would cater to distance learning.  
16 You know, we worked with Google and we looked at  
17 their digital collection of the lesson plans, sort of  
18 like a curriculum and we shared, we had best practice  
19 sharing with our program. We also shared a lot what  
20 they have learned about and I am sure you know, this  
21 will continue, this conversation will continue and I  
22 hope to work with you know some you know, experts in  
23 the field to see if we can actually come up with  
24 something that would give general guidance on remote  
25 learning, distance learning.

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CHAIRPERSON ROSE: So, what is the goal of the continued discussions? You know, you are discussing best practices, is it to standardize you know, a digital curriculum or is it you know, what's your goal for the ongoing discussions?

RONG ZHANG: Yeah, I mean, when I - so, two things. Those you know, ongoing best practice sharing is really the goal for that is not necessarily to eventually come up with something. You know, its really it is best practice sharing is to learn about how you can you know, effectively, efficiently per services, how do you use you know, different platforms effectively? How do you engage students in this, using these new tools. That's one thing and that's very important and we always do that and we continue to do that.

So, the needs of a curriculum as you just referenced, I think it is very important to have a curriculum but you know, the whole thing is that when you talk with the providers, they all say you know, they all have their own curriculum. They all have their own lesson, you know, lesson plans to follow. But when you talk about a unit one curriculum, people

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seem to you know, feel a little bit, they feel like that's rigid and all that.

And I remember a few years ago, we actually developed a curriculum for our young adult literacy program you know, which no longer exists that program. The curriculum was developed with a lot of resources developed, a lot of resources put into that and we developed one.

You know, people had mixed feelings about it. You know, some people were faithful to it, use it. Some other people you know, kept on saying that I can use that as a reference. You know, I have my own stuff.

So, when we developed that we want people to use it. So, we actually monitored the use of it and tracked it and we had mixed reactions to that to be honest with you. Some you know, love it. Some just say, well, I found that very restrictive and the materials you put over there is not always up to date, authentic, because things change.

I understand all that. You know, so that's why I think you know, it's good to have continued conversations about this and we can talk with our TA provider. We can talk with other experts in the area

1  
2 but whether to have one of that is really, we also  
3 need to listen to our providers.

4 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Are these best practices sort  
5 of incorporated in a matrix that you use when you do  
6 evaluations of these programs?

7 RONG ZHANG: Well, you know, program evaluation  
8 is really looking at you know, contract expectations  
9 outlined in the contract. The contract says that you  
10 need to have x-number of hours of staff development  
11 minimum and you have to document those activities and  
12 you have to give us a plan that shows that you know,  
13 staff development are done purposely and addressing  
14 specific needs of the staff. That we monitor and we  
15 evaluate. But best practices you know, is something  
16 that you know, for people to learn about, enrich  
17 their knowledge.

18 You know, your best practice may not be the best  
19 for my classroom. Mine may not be for yours but it  
20 is always good to be informed to know what is out  
21 there.

22 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Okay. Thank you, yeah, it's a  
23 recommendation and I appreciate that. Thank you,  
24 thank you. Thank you Chair.

1  
2 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair Rose. I am  
3 just going to confirm that there are no further  
4 questions.

5 Okay, with that, we will now turn to public  
6 testimony. I would like to remind everyone that  
7 unlike our typical Council hearings, we will be  
8 calling on individuals one by one to testify and each  
9 panelist will be given three minutes to speak.

10 Please begin once the Sergeant has started the  
11 timer. Council Members who have questions for a  
12 particular panelists, should use the raise hand  
13 function in Zoom and I will call on you after the  
14 panelist has completed their testimony.

15 For panelists, once your name is called, a member  
16 of our staff will unmute you and the Sergeant at Arms  
17 will give you the go ahead to begin upon setting the  
18 timer. Please wait for the Sergeant to announce that  
19 you may begin before delivering your testimony.

20 I would now like to welcome Steven Mahoney to  
21 testify after Steven Mahoney, we will hear from Fatma  
22 Ghailan followed by Haniff Toussaint. Steven  
23 Mahoney, you may begin when you are ready.

24 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.  
25

1  
2 STEVEN MAHONEY: Good morning, I am Steven  
3 Mahoney Assistant Director of Adult English Language  
4 Literacy at the New York Public Library.

5 I would like to thank Speaker Johnson, Committee  
6 on Youth Service Chair Deborah Rose and Committee on  
7 Immigration Chair Carlos Menchaca and the entire City  
8 Council for holding this hearing and your commitment  
9 to libraries and immigrant rights.

10 As the nations largest public library system and  
11 third largest globally, NYPL features 88 neighborhood  
12 branches and 4 scholarly research centers that serve  
13 the Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island. For 125  
14 years the libraries provided resources and  
15 opportunities for all New Yorkers and offers  
16 immigrants and their families access to cultural  
17 programs, literary resources and other critical  
18 supports across all ages, education levels and  
19 ethnicities.

20 NYPL provides essential tech services to play a  
21 role in closing the digital divide. Critical English  
22 language and literacy classes. Comprehensive career  
23 and job resources as well as essential homework and  
24 tutoring services for all New Yorkers from toddlers  
25 to older adults.

1  
2 Our ESOL and ABE classes have provided new cars  
3 with literacy skills to better engage in their  
4 communities and participate more in city and career  
5 opportunities. Before the pandemic, we taught ESOL  
6 in 39 locations. Amid the pandemic, we were able to  
7 serve over 76 of our existing clients in FY20.  
8 That's over 5,000 individuals. In FY19, we served  
9 over 7,000 students through in-person classes.

10 Our classes provide patrons with critical  
11 resources such as e-books, which help them complete  
12 course work regardless of location. Additional  
13 multimedia resources like We Speak NYC are included  
14 in our lessons. Which build on students language  
15 competencies.

16 As such, NYPL continues to seek innovative means  
17 to reach our core audience while creating access to  
18 digital literacy programs on various platforms.  
19 Moreover, through an FY20 City Council allocation,  
20 NYPL provided ESOL classes at two correctional  
21 facilities on Rikers Island this year. Offering  
22 literacy services to a significantly vulnerable  
23 population.

24 Since 2012 our Tech Connect initiative has  
25 supported adult learners of diverse background and

1  
2 cultures in their pursuit to upscale in tech. Tech  
3 Connect offers classes in multiple languages  
4 including Spanish, Chinese and Bengali and provides a  
5 range of programming from Microsoft office to Coding.  
6 Following the closure of our branches, we pivoted to  
7 an online platform with classes held throughout the  
8 day.

9       Since the libraries virtual transition, we also  
10 increased our literacy, our literary collections via  
11 Simply E by thousands. Simply E is the libraries  
12 free E reader app that brings our collection of more  
13 than 300,000 e-books and audio books to our readers  
14 in accessible format.

15       Since March we gained over 57,000 new e-readers.  
16 Access via any mobile device our Simply E collection  
17 includes materials in Spanish, Chinese, Bengali,  
18 Russian and Arabic. So, from preliterate to advanced  
19 English speakers, NYPL provides early education to  
20 formalized language instruction with support to  
21 critical literacy skills for all New Yorkers.  
22 Whether in person or virtually, the New York public  
23 library services continue to help immigrants succeed  
24 in all areas of their lives.

25       Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.



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COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
Next, we will hear from Fatma Ghailan, you may begin  
when you are ready.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

FATMA GHAILAN: Okay, now I am unmuted, thank  
you. Good morning everyone or actually, good  
afternoon. I am Fatma Ghailan Assistant Director of  
the Adult Learner Program at Queens Public Library.  
It is a pleasure to be here today on behalf of our  
president and CEO Dennis Walcott and everyone at QPL.

Thank you Chairs Menchaca and Rose as well as the  
members of the Committee's for holding this hearing  
and providing me the opportunity to testify on this  
important topic.

Libraries are the great equalizer in our  
democratic society. As such, public libraries play a  
crucial role in supporting new immigrants. Serving  
the most ethnically diverse county in America, Queens  
Public Library has long been a primary destination  
for immigrant New Yorkers.

QPL's New Americans Program NAP, provides an  
array of programs and special services to help the  
borough's immigrants integrate into American society  
and share their diverse cultures with the community

1  
2 at large. In 1977, QPL became the first public  
3 library in the nation with a department dedicated to  
4 providing comprehensive programs and services to  
5 immigrants. Almost half of the residents of Queens  
6 County are foreign born, making this program a vital  
7 resource.

8       So QPL and NAP works closely with Adult Learner  
9 Program in developing a wide range of programming to  
10 support our immigrant communities and their unique  
11 needs. We offer Adult Basic Education for  
12 immigrants, covering topics such as math, reading and  
13 writing skills, as well as High School Equivalency  
14 instruction for our immigrants who did not complete  
15 high school in their home country and whose high  
16 school diploma is not recognized in the United  
17 States.

18       Our immigrant-focused programs and services are  
19 continuously in high demand. In Fiscal Year 2019,  
20 QPL welcomed over 18,200 participants to our more  
21 than 8,600 immigrant-focused programs. We hosted  
22 over 4,600 ESOL sessions, which had over 4,100  
23 participants. Our ESOL students are seeing results.  
24 They experienced an average educational gain of 59  
25 percent and our Job & Business Academy, IELC program

1  
2 offers a number of classes and trainings for  
3 technology training and home health aide jobs.

4       So, in March, Queens Public Library closed our  
5 physical doors but we continued offering classes  
6 right away to our students serving over 1,800  
7 students and hosting over 100 virtual courses. Our  
8 NAP program did the same and we continued with  
9 training our teachers and staff members over 77  
10 teachers and staff members are now serv -

11       SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

12       FATMA GHAILAN: Okay, thank you.

13       COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
14 Next, we will hear from Haniff Toussaint, you may  
15 begin when you are ready.

16       SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

17       HANIFF TOUSSAINT: Thank you and good afternoon  
18 everyone. Thank you, Chairpersons Menchaca and Rose,  
19 and members of both committees, for the opportunity  
20 to testify today. I am Haniff Toussaint, Brooklyn  
21 Public Library's ESOL & Business English Program  
22 Coordinator. Thank you to Speaker Johnson, Majority  
23 Leader Cumbo and Finance Chair Dromm, for all your  
24 support of library services.

1  
2 With your help, BPL was able to pivot its  
3 programs almost as soon as this pandemic happened.  
4 We launched virtual and remote-by-phone versions of  
5 our Adult Basic Education, High School Equivalency  
6 and ESOL classes, conversation groups, Citizenship  
7 workshops, as well as multilingual story times for  
8 our youngest patrons.

9 Now, though the pandemic has changed how we  
10 deliver services to New Yorkers, I assure you that  
11 service to those most impacted by this pandemic, our  
12 elderly, our marginalized, our immigrants, are still  
13 intact.

14 BPL has provided ESOL instruction for over 35  
15 years and our goal has not changed even in this  
16 current climate. We serve non-native professionals,  
17 blue collar workers, stay-at-home providers, college  
18 students, newly arrived immigrants enabling them to  
19 achieve competency in the English language and  
20 digital skills that are vitally needed to function  
21 effectively as workers, parents, and citizens while  
22 navigating the complexities of New York City.

23 From the onset of COVID-19, BPL's ESOL program  
24 has assessed and enrolled hundreds of ESOL  
25 participants providing virtual instruction in 16

1  
2 ongoing classes for civics education and digital  
3 fluency. We facilitated 13 We Speak NYC sessions  
4 virtually and currently have 4 online citizenship  
5 classes and 12 virtual conversation groups. This new  
6 mode of programs posed new challenges and compounds  
7 existing ones for participants and the library.  
8 Access to technology is a major challenge for  
9 immigrant patrons. Without our branches' Wi-Fi,  
10 technology and e-resources, ESOL participants are  
11 unlikely to have similar or comparable access to  
12 computers or the internet at home.

13 To address these challenges, we've launched low  
14 tech options in our programs, creating photocopied  
15 packets for patrons who cannot participate in online  
16 classes that can be picked up from our open branches.  
17 We have held writing workshops by phone for ABE  
18 students and our tutors have been engaging ABE  
19 students by phone to help those who aren't connected  
20 online to improve their literacy skills. BPL grant  
21 writers have reached out to funders to explore the  
22 feasibility of providing technology and Wi-Fi to our  
23 learners. There is a major need here that we hope  
24 our government and foundation partners will seek to  
25 address.

1  
2 While we are doing our best to ensure a  
3 continuous learning experience for existing students

4 -

5 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

6 HANIFF TOUSSAINT: Thank you.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

8 I will now ask if Council Member have questions for  
9 this panel. Council Member Chin.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Yeah, I have a question for  
11 the panelists talking about the ESOL programs at the  
12 libraries. I just want to know like if you could  
13 tell me in terms of the funding for these classes.  
14 Are those funding's from the city? And also, like do  
15 you have to provide data to the funding source to the  
16 city in terms of the number of immigrant adults that  
17 participate in your English language classes?

18 STEVEN MAHONEY: I will say for the New York  
19 Public Library, our ESOL classes are supported  
20 through a mix of city, state and private funding and  
21 for various funders, we are providing yearly update  
22 reports.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: For the city funding, is  
24 that from DYCD?

25 STEVEN MAHONEY: Yes.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Oh, so you are part of the  
3 DYCD portfolio then?

4 FATMA GHAILAN: We are and it is the same for  
5 Queens Public Library.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Okay, but what - I'm just  
7 curious, like how do we compile all the data that  
8 shows the number of immigrant adults that are taking  
9 these classes? Because I think early on, from the  
10 early testimony, we talk about you know, how many  
11 percentage or limited English speakers and I just  
12 wanted to get an idea in terms of like, who is  
13 pulling all this information together? So, we know  
14 is the majority of this population is being served,  
15 you know, by city programs, by CBO's, by the library,  
16 by CUNY. It's like, I just want to really get a  
17 sense of like, are we providing enough right. Are  
18 there still a large population out there that are not  
19 being served. So, yeah, I mean like if there is a  
20 way of really collecting all this information, I  
21 don't know which city agency - that's my question  
22 earlier. You know, like CUNY is providing classes,  
23 DOE is providing classes, the library is providing  
24 classes, CBO, it's like, okay, are we serving all the  
25

1  
2 immigrant population that needs the service or are we  
3 serving only half?

4       So, that would give us a better sense like, how  
5 much more funding that we need to advocate for. So,  
6 Chair, I don't know if we can really get the city to  
7 like, that's what the coordination is. Like somebody  
8 should be gathering this information, so we have a  
9 better sense of what is, what's the need out there in  
10 terms of the population that still needs this  
11 service. Thank you.

12       FATMA GHAILAN: Well, we do get our numbers from  
13 different city agencies in auditing agencies. The  
14 Queens Public Library does definitely not serve  
15 everyone. We could, and who needs to be served,  
16 again, we talked about the waiting lists earlier.

17       It is true that we have different programs from  
18 the different agencies, CBO's, universities,  
19 colleges, but it still does not serve the need.  
20 There is a huge population that is underserved and  
21 does not know how to go about finding services or  
22 communicating with programs.

23       So, I would say for example, for Queens, we know  
24 in numbers that we have over 50 percent that is  
25 foreign born, who need language programs. We have a



1  
2 high number of Queens born and foreign born without  
3 High School Equivalency, but the library offers  
4 classes and serves you know, a few thousand a year.

5 So, that definitely does not cover the need.

6 STEVEN MAHONEY: I would say the New York Public  
7 Library, the demand far exceeds our ability to serve  
8 everybody looking for services. Within the last four  
9 years or so, we really increased our informal ESOL  
10 programming for students who may not be available to  
11 meet the rigor of our formal ESOL instruction. That  
12 we provide a more flexible schedule for informal  
13 instruction using We Speak NYC and other conversation  
14 materials. And this is also the first point of  
15 contact for many immigrants in the city, that they  
16 come to the library for a low intensity educational  
17 experience.

18 So, coming for a conversation group, two hours  
19 one day a week, that could then be an onramp to them  
20 transitioning to our formal ESOL program. So, it is  
21 our way of being able to cast a wider net in serving  
22 the needs of the city.

23 FATMA GHAILAN: I would like also to add that, I  
24 am sorry Haniff, go ahead.

1  
2 HANIFF TOUSSAINT: Well, thank you. I just  
3 wanted to add that from the Council Members question,  
4 are you looking for an overarching body that sort of  
5 manages or can provide information on all these ESOL  
6 and immigrant programs. So, whereby we can find  
7 pockets that is not being served appropriately.

8 I mean, that is a welcoming thing, however, right  
9 now with all three you know, libraries and even our  
10 CBO's and colleges and so forth, we take a poll, we  
11 surveyed our districts, our neighborhoods and so  
12 forth. I mean BPL, through our 58, 59 branches, we  
13 are basically less than you know, half a mile in the  
14 neighborhood.

15 So, we are able to survey our local neighborhoods  
16 and we can target you know, where the greatest needs  
17 are, so we can provide classes in those  
18 neighborhoods.

19 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
20 I will now ask if any other Council Members have  
21 questions. Council Member Menchaca.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yes. And thank you for  
23 this panel. The dedication is real and the hurdles  
24 are also real and a lot of the discussion that we are  
25

1  
2 really linking here is about digital divide, the  
3 infrastructure.

4 And so, if there is anything else that you want  
5 to add to that, I want this to be an opportunity to  
6 really think about what those barriers are and what  
7 the city can do. This is a City Council hearing; we  
8 are thinking about a lot of things policy but we are  
9 also thinking about budget as we get into this next  
10 year's budget and that's on everyone's mind. Is  
11 there something that we can do and really hear from  
12 you about what is needed for training, for tutorials,  
13 anything relating to digital that you haven't said  
14 already.

15 FATMA GHAILAN: I am happy to start. The list is  
16 long for sure.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Good.

18 FATMA GHAILAN: One thing I would like to just  
19 mention that a number of people we have been serving  
20 under, certain grains, whether it is city or federal,  
21 you know, the amount of money we use to serve let's  
22 say 1,000 people before, now can only serve 200 since  
23 the requirements are different.

24 Since now, we are required to do job training.  
25 We are doing case management, so again, the dollar

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does not go as far as it used to before. Again, you know, the quality is definitely better. We are preparing our students for the job market but we are not reaching to the core population that only needs to talk to a teacher. That only needs to go to the store and to, you know, for basic everyday living and to talk about needs. You know, the first thing is nobody was prepared. Nobody was trained to work remotely.

So, that's the first you know, hurdle that we all face is, okay, the library has closed their physical doors but were offering classes right away. We continued supporting our students right away, which required providing our staff with computers. Providing them with hotspots and then training on them on how to use it. You know, simple things like, just using Zoom or any other platform requires a lot of training and a lot of work and then you transfer that to the students who are again, grappling just day by day making sure that they have food on the table. That they have other skills that are added to their you know, digital, not digital but literacy skills.

1  
2       So, computers as our colleague mentioned earlier,  
3 laptops, hotspots and training on how to train. So,  
4 our staff also needs support to be able to provide  
5 the right materials and trainings for our students.

6       CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Now, can I just go a  
7 little bit deeper and ask, that training that's  
8 required and needed for say the library and the  
9 institution, is that something that you are seeing as  
10 ubiquitous in understanding and the training. Like,  
11 is it the same training that everyone needs to get?  
12 Is there something that is universal in training that  
13 everyone would do if the city were prepared to do on  
14 Macs. I am hearing from teachers; I am hearing from  
15 parents. I am hearing from so many different places  
16 that want training. Are we talking about the same  
17 training or are we talking about something very  
18 specific about what you do, your program, your  
19 teacher, what's happening at the library?

20       FATMA GHAILAN: Well, some of it is the same,  
21 which is basic additional literacy. You know, how to  
22 turn on a computer. How to connect to Macs, how to  
23 access Zoom. How to use the basic functions of  
24 Google Classroom. There is the basic. And then  
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there is also instruction over you know, online  
virtually.

So, we all talk about synchronize and a  
synchronize instruction. Well, first of all, what  
does each one mean and then what are the  
requirements. Again, we train all of our teachers  
you know, to engage their students. So, we want our  
classes to be communicated and to teach our students  
to learn. You know, we are talking [INAUDIBLE  
2:26:36]. Now, how do you do that virtually?

So, I have a group of students, so let's say you  
are all my students, how do I engage all of you? It  
is hard to get you to do pair work, group work,  
participate, for people to understand and then all  
the background that is behind you. So, sometimes you  
know, basic things of just having a virtual  
background using headphones.

So, there are two folds, two kinds of training.  
There is the basic of your teacher and staff being  
able to use a computer but there is also how to  
deliver training and lessons virtually.

CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Got it, thank you. This  
is just helping me think about what we can do to  
start presenting some ideas. So, this is helpful.

1  
2 STEVEN MAHONEY: I would like to say that when we  
3 are registering our students, we try to develop  
4 curricula that's addressing students where they are  
5 at. And so, as we are registering each student, we  
6 are trying to do a tech inventory and a needs  
7 assessment.

8 In our last cohort, synchronize learning, we  
9 surveyed students, how are you accessing our classes?  
10 About 50 percent stated they were logging in with a  
11 desk top or a laptop. Then 25 percent on a tablet  
12 but then there was still 25 percent using their  
13 cellphone and if those 25 percent on a cellphone,  
14 they are not necessarily having access to Wi-Fi, they  
15 are using data.

16 Using the data on their phone can seriously  
17 impede access to the class and then staying in the  
18 class. So, if you are talking about opportunities to  
19 provide greater opportunity and access for students  
20 in the digital divide, we could see a great use for  
21 additional access to Wi-Fi for our students.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Yeah, that's been  
23 incredibly clear, even before this hearing but I  
24 think we need to hear it in this hearing and I am  
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glad you are – and I think you are going to hear it across the entire set of panels.

And so, that's just going to be helpful for information so that we can take it back to all the Council Members and say, we got to solve this. Thank you. That's it for me.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. Are there any other questions from Council Members? Okay, we will be moving onto our next panel.

Our next panel will be Ira Yankwitt followed by Lena Cohen followed by Liza Schwartzwald followed by Stacie Evans. I would now like to welcome Ira Yankwitt to testify, you may begin when you are ready.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

IRA YANKWITT: Thank you Chair Menchaca and Chair Rose for the opportunity to testify. My name is Ira Yankwitt, and I am the Executive Director of the Literacy Assistance Center, a 37-year-old not-for-profit organization dedicated to strengthening and expanding the adult education system and also a proud member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy.



1  
2       This past May the LAC conducted a survey of over  
3 50 adult literacy providers in the city to learn  
4 about the impact of COVID-19 on students and  
5 programs. The findings were sobering but not  
6 surprising. We learned that adult literacy students  
7 were struggling with job and income loss, supporting  
8 their children's homeschooling, food and housing  
9 insecurity, caring for family members, risks as  
10 essential workers, immigration issues, mental health  
11 issues, and access to healthcare. And that all of  
12 these issues were exacerbated by limited reading,  
13 writing, English language, and/or digital literacy  
14 skills. Moreover, lack of access to hardware and  
15 reliable internet service were a major barrier to  
16 students participating in classes and respondents  
17 estimated that an average of 65% of their students  
18 were facing technology obstacles.

19       At the same time, we saw that adult literacy  
20 programs rose to the moment quickly, moving and  
21 adapting their instruction to remote platforms like  
22 Zoom, Google Classroom, and WhatsApp and providing  
23 additional one-on-one support to their students  
24 through phone calls, text messages, online platforms,  
25 emails, and expanded support services, including

1  
2 providing information on the rapidly changing public  
3 health situation.

4       We learned that, for students with reliable  
5 technology and internet access, remote learning  
6 offered some benefits, including the ability to limit  
7 travel and child care expenses, participate in  
8 classes at a wider range of times, attend classes  
9 even if they are ill or less mobile, and gain digital  
10 literacy skills while engaging with other content.  
11 Strikingly, nearly half the programs reported that  
12 they envisioned continuing to offer some form of  
13 remote teaching even after they are able to reopen in  
14 person, and they see this as an opportunity to serve  
15 a greater number of students at a time of increased  
16 need and demand.

17       Still, there is concern that an over-reliance on  
18 remote adult literacy programming could leave behind  
19 those adults who do not have hardware, dependable  
20 internet access, or digital literacy skills; and  
21 almost all of the providers expressed a need for  
22 greater professional development on remote teaching  
23 and learning, more resources for their students, and  
24 increased paid planning time for their staff.  
25 Indeed, as the DYCD-funded technical assistance

1  
2 provider to community-based adult literacy programs,  
3 the Literacy Assistance Center has seen an  
4 unprecedented demand for our services over the last  
5 six months.

6 We responded by providing regular webinars that  
7 introduced teachers to Zoom and other online tools,  
8 by holding individual coaching sessions with teachers  
9 and providing customized professional development  
10 programs to assist with the integration of digital  
11 platforms and the design of remote curriculum and  
12 instruction.

13 So, what do we need to do? First, we must ensure  
14 that every adult literacy student who needs it is  
15 provided with the necessary hardware

16 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time.

17 IRA YANKWITT: And free internet to be able to  
18 access classes. Second, as we move toward envisioning  
19 the FY22 budget, we must find the resources to invest  
20 in the adult literacy pilot project that NYCCAL had  
21 been discussing with you and your colleagues prior to  
22 the pandemic. And third, over the long term, we need  
23 to quintuple the cumulative funding for adult  
24 literacy education in New York City. Currently, the  
25 total state and city funding for adult literacy

1  
2 education in NYC amounts to approximately \$85 million  
3 a year, less than \$40 a year for each of the 2.2  
4 million adults in need and just over \$1,000 for every  
5 student who is able to access classes. We need to  
6 work together to dramatically increase this funding  
7 both to serve far more than the 3 percent to the 2.2  
8 million adults in need that we're currently serving  
9 and to provide those students, their teachers, and  
10 their programs with the full range of resources,  
11 supports, and benefits they need and deserve.

12         Sorry for the technological glitch and thank you  
13 for the opportunity to testify.

14         COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
15 I would now like to welcome Lena Cohen to testify.  
16 You may begin when you are ready.

17         SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

18         LENA COHEN: Hi, thank you so much. My name is  
19 Lena Cohen, I am a Policy Analyst at United  
20 Neighborhood Houses.

21         First, I just want to say thank you to Chair  
22 Menchaca, Chair Rose and all of the City Council  
23 Members for being on today and discussing something  
24 that often gets overlooked, which is Adult Literacy  
25 education.

1  
2 For background, United Neighborhood Houses is a  
3 policy and social change organization representing 44  
4 settlement houses that serve over 765,000 New Yorkers  
5 each year through neighborhood based programs and  
6 services.

7 Thanks to the City Council, adult literacy  
8 programs are one of the few services available in New  
9 York City that meet immigrants and adult learners  
10 where they are at by offering them real accredited  
11 educational gains. And that really is thanks to the  
12 leadership in the City Council.

13 Since the COVID-19 outbreak, community based  
14 programs have transitioned to remote learning with  
15 positive results as we have already heard from some  
16 of our colleagues and I want to emphasize that this  
17 is an effective streamlined holistic approach. It is  
18 something the City Council celebrates and supports  
19 and we hope the Administration will fully embrace the  
20 community based model 2.

21 Nonprofit providers are fighting to keep their  
22 doors open right now and really every dollar is  
23 essential to ensuring that they can do that.

24 That's why I want to point out that we are very  
25 concerned that it remains unclear whether the full

1  
2 amount of money that the administration allocated to  
3 adult literacy providers in Fiscal Year 21, was  
4 actually spent on DYCD contracts.

5 As the economic crisis we are in gets worse, the  
6 Administration needs to be transparent on this and we  
7 urge the Administration to recognize the  
8 effectiveness of the programs we are talking about  
9 today. Because they really are a one stop shop for  
10 everything that we know our adult learning population  
11 needs.

12 I will close by saying that the community based  
13 organization sector is ready to work with you to  
14 figure out how the city can navigate this or can  
15 navigate the financial burden of this pandemic and we  
16 are really excited to see adult literacy programs  
17 lifted up because we know they work and it is  
18 something to be proud and figure out how to be  
19 effective leaders in this state.

20 I look forward to partnering with the City  
21 Council moving forward and just again, want to say  
22 thank you for this time.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
24 I would now like to turn to Liza Schwartzwald to  
25 testify, you may begin when you are ready.

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

LIZA SCHWARTZWALD: Thank you. Good afternoon and thank you Chairs Menchaca and Rose for the opportunity to testify and for the continued investments of the city in adult literacy. My name is Liza Schwartzwald, I am a Manager of Education Policy at the New York Immigration Coalition, an umbrella policy and advocacy organization for more than 200 groups serving immigrants and refugees across New York State.

"I came here for my family. I want better for my family." that's a direct quote from Caro, a student at the China Town Man Power project. While Carol has survived in New York City using her children as translators, she knows her children will eventually move out and she will be on her own. Since this realization, Carol has made it her mission to be more confident and reach out to more people using her English. Carol found the CMP through her work union three years ago. Since joining the adult English literacy classes, Carol has improved so much that she has found a job as a home health aide, she feels so confident and says, "I can even call my patient's

1  
2 doctor and make appointments for them. They  
3 understand me!"

4 Carol is one of the many students who have  
5 benefited from adult literacy classes and has kept  
6 connected with her adult literacy community  
7 throughout the entirety of this crisis. The need for  
8 New York City's adult literacy system for students  
9 like Carol has never been more desperate. A  
10 generation of our most vulnerable youth are being  
11 completely excluded from learning because their  
12 parents and grandparents can't access information  
13 online. Don't have or use devices and can't read  
14 emails coming from their schools, only in English.

15 When parents can't speak English can't  
16 connect, their children can't either. And that is a  
17 huge loss for the entire family. Our adult literacy  
18 system has built a web of support bolstering these  
19 families to help them address all of these challenges  
20 together with one trusted partner. It has been an  
21 incredibly powerful approach during this crisis but  
22 we are not able to serve anywhere near the amount of  
23 families who need this support and parents and their  
24 children are the ones that are paying the price for  
25 that and I think New York City as a whole.



1  
2       So, to support these families, we ask the city  
3 for a few things. One, keep adult literacy programs  
4 whole, restore the \$12 million that we've had and  
5 consider expanding that money. And also ensure  
6 timely payments of FY21 contracts to make sure that  
7 we can all continue going and keep the structure of  
8 the adult literacy system sound.

9       Two, provide adult literacy students with  
10 internet enabled devices as we have done with the K-  
11 12 system. You know, the students in K-12 have  
12 received iPads and received laptops that have not  
13 only internet access but also hotspots. So, the  
14 child's device can actually support five other  
15 devices for internet connection. That's been an  
16 excellent way.

17       And then third, I will echo Ira here and say  
18 invest to fund the NYCAL pilot program with an  
19 increased rate over the next few years. That would  
20 allow the field to demonstrate that programs with  
21 truly sufficient funding can go above and beyond to  
22 provide all the assistance that families need  
23 including digital literacy.

24       SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

1  
2 LIZA SCHWARTZWALD: Which is so critical this  
3 year. Thank you so much for the opportunity to  
4 testify.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
6 I would like to now welcome Stacie Evans. You may  
7 begin when you are ready.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

9 STACIE EVANS: Good afternoon Council Member  
10 Menchaca, Council Member Rose and members of the  
11 Committees on Immigration and Youth Services.

12 I am Stacie Evans, University Director for  
13 Language and Literacy Programs at CUNY. Thank you  
14 for the opportunity to testify today and for your  
15 ongoing focus on adult literacy and services for  
16 immigrant New Yorkers.

17 For nearly 40 years, CUNY has helped adults  
18 develop the foundational skills critical to achieving  
19 their goals. CUNY offers 15 programs in English for  
20 Speakers of Other Languages, and seven occupational  
21 training programs specifically for English language  
22 learners.

23 New Yorkers who lack English language proficiency  
24 cannot access higher education, training, and  
25 employment opportunities. In addition, digital

1  
2 literacy skills are essential for accessing  
3 government programs, finding community-based  
4 services, connecting with children's teachers, and  
5 finding education and workforce training programs.

6 A September article from the Migration Policy  
7 Institute notes that, "the proportion of US adults  
8 with no computer experience is much higher for  
9 immigrants who speak a language other than English at  
10 home." The digital divide is often greater for  
11 "people of color, those with lower incomes, and those  
12 with lesser levels of education". These are the same  
13 New Yorkers who attend our programs.

14 When COVID-19 was declared a pandemic, adult  
15 literacy programs needed to shift online which  
16 presented seemingly insurmountable obstacles,  
17 particularly the concern that many students lacked  
18 the skills and tools to participate in a meaningful  
19 way.

20 Digital inclusion was a serious issues before the  
21 pandemic and became more pronounced and acute with  
22 quarantine. The transition to online learning  
23 presented serious challenges. Aside from having to  
24 learn new technology, students had to sort out how  
25 best to access online content. Many lacked adequate

1 internet service at home, if they had service at all.

2 Many lacked computers or tablets to access virtual  
3 classrooms. Many also had to juggle school and work  
4 with homeschooling their children and sharing home  
5 devices with children and other family members.

6 Programs and students determination made the move  
7 online successful.  
8

9 Staff helped students access free and low cost  
10 internet services. The University was able to  
11 provide loaner devices to some students. Webinars  
12 and screencasts were created to demonstrate the use  
13 of various tools. CUNY's professional development  
14 team facilitated teacher trainings and resource  
15 shares, joined Zoom classes to support instruction,  
16 and created instructional materials. Program case  
17 managers helped students access food resources,  
18 financial help, health information, and legal  
19 support. To quote one program director, all staff  
20 took a "no student left behind approach" to remote  
21 learning.

22 A number of positives have come from our shift to  
23 online learning. Students have used asynchronous  
24 learning platforms to build support networks and  
25 friendships outside of class. Students technology,

1  
2 confidence and skills have increased. Most  
3 importantly, students have persisted. They are  
4 attending classes and taking on the challenge of  
5 learning the digital skills necessary to support  
6 their continued program participation.

7 We are grateful for the Council's support and the  
8 commitment to helping immigrant New Yorkers achieve  
9 English proficiency and adapt to their lives in this  
10 City.

11 CUNY is proud to be an essential partner in the  
12 network for adult literacy providers. Thank you.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
14 I will now ask if Council Members have questions. As  
15 a reminder, if you have a question, please use the  
16 Zoom raise hand function.

17 Council Member Menchaca.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Hi everyone and I want to  
19 say thank you to you all. You are NYCAL, the  
20 coalition that has been working on this for such a  
21 long time. I want to thank you for your work and now  
22 more than ever, really listening to what you are  
23 saying becomes even more critical that we understand  
24 the issues and respond immediately in this pandemic.  
25 The pandemic that is a public health issue but it is

1  
2 also an economic issue and an access issue. And I  
3 just want to lift something that you all said, really  
4 in different ways but are saying the same thing.  
5 That in order for us to move through this, we need to  
6 acknowledge that the issues that are coming in are  
7 both in our youth that are in this public education  
8 system conundrum and that that same issue is with our  
9 parents and the adults that are in that same family.  
10 Both of them are experiencing Wi-Fi issues, both of  
11 them are experiencing technology issues and that we  
12 need to address it all. That they are equal because  
13 this is about a family. This is about a family that  
14 needs access to all these services. And so that just  
15 can't be ignored and I think before, it was a  
16 different need because the need was not that great.  
17 Where now, we are 100 percent remote, who knows when  
18 we are going to go back to a place where a classroom  
19 space becomes a new norm but this is where we are  
20 right now. And I think I just want to articulate  
21 that and really kind of repeat that back.

22       The next thing I want to say is that the pilot  
23 becomes another important conversation. That we are  
24 talking about quality education. That quality is  
25 also changing as well. We need so many wrap around

1  
2 services but we need to pay teachers what they are  
3 worth.

4 The things that they are now holding, and this is  
5 the same thing that's happening with if you listen to  
6 the UFT teachers and what they are having to hold,  
7 the training is needed, the support is needed and the  
8 need for more resources. If we want this to be a  
9 successful component of our recovery, we have to fund  
10 it and that's what I heard.

11 I think the last thing that I want to maybe ask,  
12 those are more statements are some of the  
13 recommendations that you laid out in terms of what we  
14 can actually do to move this conversation forward and  
15 really ask the Mayor's Office to prepare for a budget  
16 that puts adult literacy at the front end and not  
17 wait until the very end when we are negotiating this  
18 budget and the final pieces. This should be at the  
19 forefront of the Mayor's Office and at the forefront  
20 of the preliminary budget that we could see early  
21 2021.

22 So, is there one thing - I am giving you the  
23 opportunity to talk about that can really kind of  
24 highlight what the City of New York can do to address  
25 the issues that you are speaking to.

1  
2 IRA YANKWITT: I think part of this is shifting  
3 from seeing adult literacy education as a supplement  
4 to the education system at large and a privilege for  
5 a select few.

6 When we are only talking about serving 3 to 4  
7 percent of the 2.2 million in need and really seeing  
8 it as an essential and vital part of our educational  
9 system and a right to all that need it. Everything  
10 to me flows from there because if you believe that  
11 this is a right, if you believe that it is a moral  
12 obligation of a progressive city, of a sanctuary  
13 city, then you start to work toward a vision for how  
14 to fully fund it. Both fully funding in term of  
15 providing the resources to serve a significantly  
16 greater number and fully funding it to give the  
17 students who are in those classes and the programs  
18 that run those classes the resources that they need.

19 And I think we at NYCAL could certainly layout a  
20 vision for how to expand those services and resources  
21 over time. I mentioned in my testimony that the  
22 literacy system center is leading an initiative. It  
23 is calling for five times city and state funding.  
24 Currently city and state funding for New York City is  
25 approximately \$85 million. We would like to get that



1  
2 up to half a million dollars and really be able to  
3 serve those who need serves and we would love to work  
4 with you and your colleagues to lay out that vision.

5 LENA COHEN: And I will jump in, thank you Ira.  
6 I think Ira lays out some really specific and forward  
7 looking plans to improve the quality of service as  
8 well as the experience for both teachers and  
9 students. Ultimately setting New York up for a  
10 better future. And just to add onto that from the  
11 logistical end I suppose, it is really important I  
12 think first that New York as a city recognizes it  
13 already has a system for adult literacy education  
14 that works and it works really well. It's just  
15 extremely underfunded but that gives us something  
16 really solid to work with. There are many things  
17 that we are committed to improving within the program  
18 in terms of curriculum, in terms of data management  
19 collection, but just in general, the fact that we  
20 have many providers based in New York City that are  
21 doing what they can to serve as many individuals in  
22 need of literacy support as possible. It just means  
23 that these providers need to be recognized. Their  
24 work needs to be uplifted and ultimately they have  
25 yet to see that in anything more than a modest

1 investment in the Administrations support for this  
2 sector throughout the last eight years. So, we are  
3 really thankful for the progress this effort has made  
4 to get us to a point where we can say, lets invest in  
5 this system that we have established together but  
6 that really requires transparency and understanding  
7 where every dollar is going now more than ever since  
8 we are in a very severe budget crisis.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: And let me just ask this  
11 last question and Liza if you want to come in and  
12 offer your perspective or just go ahead -

13 LIZA SCHWARTZWALD: No go ahead, I go with what  
14 they said. Yeah, I just appreciate the generation  
15 outlook and the importance of adult literacy, the  
16 adult literacy system working with other systems like  
17 the Department of Education, working with people to  
18 ensure that as we are looking at an economic crisis,  
19 as we are looking at an educational crisis, knowing  
20 that this system is actually perfectly situated to  
21 start addressing all of those things together.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Right, including even the  
23 young person at home trying to learn, if we can solve  
24 the adult literacy piece. We solved the young person  
25 piece and actually create synergy here that it is

1  
2 just waiting for us to actually prioritize and I see  
3 that more clearly.

4       The transparency piece is important and one of  
5 those pieces is about the increase in the number of  
6 seats and the extension of contracts. Has anyone in  
7 the Administration reached out to you about that  
8 increase in contracts with the seats and slots. Has  
9 that been communicated to NYCAL at all? We just  
10 heard that it was – we confirmed it today that they  
11 are putting more funding, where they are actually  
12 increasing it in a few hundred slots for more  
13 providers. Did you all get a communication about  
14 that?

15       IRA YANKWITT: So, what I know because as was  
16 mentioned earlier, the LAC is the technical  
17 assistance provider to DYCD, so we work very closely  
18 with them. My understanding is that the contracts  
19 for providers and I know there are providers in this  
20 meeting who could speak to this, are moving forward.  
21 They are moving forward slowly. I think there has  
22 been layers of additional review that they have had  
23 to go through this particular year but the question  
24 of expansion of services – you know, this is going to  
25 be an interesting year because on the one hand, there

1  
2 are individuals who have been in classes in the past  
3 who because of the digital literacy and hardware  
4 issues that we mentioned are not able to continue  
5 with their classes.

6 On the other hand, there are those who otherwise  
7 wouldn't have been able to access classes because of  
8 work, time, childcare needs, mobility issues, who are  
9 not able to attend those classes.

10 So, I think it is going to be interesting to see  
11 how the numbers of participants this year, with the  
12 same level of funding compares to years past and  
13 whether we see with remote learning, if we get a  
14 greater number, a smaller number and then I think the  
15 data analysis has to be about how the demographics  
16 shifted. The profiles of students shifted even if  
17 the numbers are the same or increased. Who have we  
18 gained, who have lost, how are the characteristics  
19 differently.

20 I think there is also a question for those of us  
21 in NYCAL about the 6.4 million I believe it is on the  
22 Admin side, is all of that going to the expansion of  
23 contracts, as I believe was intended or is some of  
24 that still going to MOIA or other city agencies. In  
25 the past it went to community schools. So, we really

1  
2 don't know where all the money has gone to even  
3 though whatever money is being allocated seems to be  
4 a bit slowly.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank you for  
6 that and we are going to get to the bottom of a lot  
7 of that. I am going to hand it back to Committee  
8 Counsel and I will be stepping out for a few minutes  
9 to make a statement at another hearing I am Chairing  
10 with Rivera and Cabrera on the Census and so, I will  
11 be in and out. Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Chair. Council  
13 Member Chin, would you like to ask a question?

14 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you. Thank you to  
15 this panel, I think it is really enlightening to  
16 really, to learn you know the broader outlook and the  
17 coalition view of the adult literacy and they you  
18 know, the amount of funding that really needs to be  
19 provided and the small percentage of you know, people  
20 who are being served.

21 I mean, that's why earlier I was asking like, how  
22 many people are actually you know, getting this  
23 service and it is very unclear. Yes, you know, we  
24 fight for money. It is not enough and there is such  
25 a growing you know, immigrant population. That could

1  
2 definitely use this and I think going forward in the  
3 future, really looking at remote learning as a real  
4 opportunity to engage more people.

5 I think early on, I think it was from Ira's  
6 testimony, I mean, yeah, I mean like, we are talking  
7 about DOE offering you know, tablets and hotspots and  
8 to that student. And that student is within the  
9 family and if that services could be also utilized by  
10 the adult parents. I mean just imagine that we would  
11 reach a lot more people but the problem is the lack  
12 of coordination within the Administration.

13 Like, everybody is on their own and that's what I  
14 asked earlier, is there a Deputy Mayor that's like,  
15 you know, overseeing all of this and really looking  
16 at how do we you know, provide the resources and make  
17 the connections, so everyone can have an access.

18 I mean, yeah, they are providing tablets to  
19 seniors in NYCHA. Well if that senior happens to be  
20 you know, in a family where there are kids and there  
21 are adults, I mean there are opportunities for them  
22 to really learn together or the kid could help the  
23 grandparent. But we just don't have that information  
24 and I think we really need to figure out how do we  
25 get it from the Administration and also utilizing the

1  
2 opportunity. I know there is not enough funding and  
3 I am not even sure like, what the state is doing in  
4 terms of their share in the federal government but  
5 hopefully in the future. I mean, if there is another  
6 you know, stimulus packet that comes in, I think we  
7 really need to be in a position to advocate you know,  
8 for enough funding, for more funding. You know, for  
9 these programs and really look at a broader outlook  
10 in terms of how do we kind of look at the learning  
11 possibility of learning English and adult learning  
12 and job training. You know, using technology and  
13 really make sure there is adequate funding.

14 I know for a lot of the CBO's, there is not even  
15 just funding for these programs right. I know right  
16 now, we are funding for - try to fight for the  
17 indirect cost that was promised so the organization  
18 could survive, but I think this is such an important  
19 service. You know, to the city not just immigrant  
20 population. Adult population, that can you know,  
21 utilize adult literacy so they can improve and learn  
22 the technology so they can get a better job, get a  
23 promotion, earn more money.

24 All that connected. So, I think that is really  
25 important that all the coalition and you know, the

1  
2 advocacy community really work with us. I think in  
3 this upcoming budget with the Council to really  
4 strategize, what are some of the things that we  
5 should be pushing for in terms of you know, more  
6 funding? How much more and then the statistic to  
7 back it up. And then also a really comprehensive  
8 view of what you know, the future of you know remote  
9 learning and technology and how do we sort of really  
10 utilize this to provide better services and get you  
11 know, more people included.

12 STACIE EVANS: I would just say that you know,  
13 there is a Deputy Mayor that adult education falls  
14 under. It is Deputy Mayor Phil Thompson, who is  
15 Strategic Policy Initiatives because adult literacy  
16 is seen as being part of the workforce system. Adult  
17 literacy is part of the purview of the Mayor's Office  
18 of Workforce Development.

19 I am not saying that's the right place for it. I  
20 don't believe that's the right place for it but  
21 that's where it sits. And so, if there is a  
22 conversation to be had, it is to try to push to see  
23 the funding increased. Yes, that's the first thing  
24 but to also see the attention that is paid by the  
25 Mayor's Office of Workforce Development and the



1  
2 Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives to  
3 adult education increase.

4 Like, the funding is so small for adult literacy,  
5 I feel like it falls down on the list of important  
6 topics to talk about when it actually should be a  
7 much important thing for people to focus on. But  
8 starting that conversation with Phil Thompson, would  
9 be something I am sure many of us would be happy to  
10 engage in with you.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: I think we could do that.  
12 I know Phil. I mean, it's just like I said earlier,  
13 I share the Committee on Aging. There is no Deputy  
14 Mayor overseeing Department for the Aging. I think  
15 DYCD is all Human Services.

16 I mean, that's why the seniors, you know the  
17 older population doesn't get recognized and the  
18 budget for the Department of Aging is like less than  
19 half a percent of the city's budget. It is just so  
20 ridiculous that we're not you know, meeting the need  
21 of this growing population.

22 So, it is the same all around and that's why  
23 we're pushing you know, the Mayor and the  
24 Administration. You know, they kind of put more  
25

1  
2 emphasis on this group that is really the ones that  
3 really helping build the city.

4       So, I think going forward, we will – I will talk  
5 to you know, Council Member Rose, right. We could  
6 ask for a meeting with Deputy Mayor Thompson and  
7 really to get him to help us to strategize a little  
8 bit. And I think we really need to have a  
9 comprehensive plan going forward. I know some of us  
10 are term limited and we want to do whatever we can to  
11 lay a strong foundation before we leave office.  
12 Because you know, it's like every year we fight so  
13 hard just to get the small amount of money put back  
14 at the end.

15       And as you know, Council Member Menchaca said  
16 earlier, it should be in the preliminary budget. It  
17 should be up front and so, that's why I think the  
18 important work needs to start now and we need to make  
19 sure that going forward, that the emphasis and you  
20 know people do recognize the importance of you know,  
21 adult literacy, adult education for the city. For  
22 the city to recover, for the city to grow. You know,  
23 this is so important.

24       So, I really thank all the advocates and all the  
25 providers for the great work that you are doing but

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you need to get recognized and you need to get the support. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Council Member Chin, I want to thank you for those remarks and you, Council Member and Chair Menchaca and I are both all on the budget negotiating team and I think it is really a great idea that we put together a strategic plan for how we are going to address you know, adult literacy seniors and our youth services -

COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Populations. So, I think the three of us will make a dynamic team and we want to thank the advocates for giving us all of the information that we need to fight you know a very important battle. So, we will do that.

COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: That's true. Thank you Debbie, thank you Chair Rose, yes.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you Council Member. Seeing no other questions, we will be moving to our next panel. Our next panel will be Pabitra Benjamin followed by Ravi Reddi, followed by Jeehae Fischer followed by Selvia Sikder. Pabitra Benjamin, you may begin when you are ready.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

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PABITRA BENJAMIN: Thank you Chairperson  
Menchaca, Rose and Members of the Immigration and  
Youth Service Committee for holding this important  
hearing. My name is Pabitra Khati Benjamin and I am  
the Executive Director of Adhikaar.

Adhikaar is the only worker and community center  
serving and organizing the Nepali speaking community  
on workers' rights, immigrant rights, access to  
healthcare and language justice issues. We are  
women-led and our community is one of the newer and  
most rapidly-growing immigrant communities in New  
York City. We are here today to ask the members of  
the Committee to prioritize as you are doing  
immigrant adult and digital literacy in the city's  
budget, especially for Adhikaar.

Adhikaar reaches more than 10,000 Nepali speaking  
immigrants a year. Our members are domestic workers,  
nail salon workers, restaurant workers, and workers  
in other informal industries. Most live in Queens  
and Brooklyn.

Our English for Empowerment class has to date  
served nearly 1000 members. We have integrated the  
city's We Speak New York curriculum and also woven in  
over the years our members' experiences of being

1  
2 immigrant workers. Together we improve literacy and  
3 language capacity in our community while expanding  
4 community consciousness towards civic participation,  
5 city navigation, support for children and improving  
6 working conditions for all.

7       On average 200 people, 90 percent women attend  
8 our EFE classes every year. Together facilitators,  
9 volunteer over 500 hours a year. For almost 14 years,  
10 our staff has run this robust curriculum with very  
11 minimal support. We run EFE because our community  
12 needs it. People like Mohini, a domestic worker  
13 member at Adhikaar, who said about four years ago, I  
14 heard about Adhikaar from my friend. She told me  
15 Adhikaar had free English classes and am very  
16 thankful because I learned so much. Not just to  
17 speak English but survival skills. Getting from place  
18 to place, the train, understanding my rights. In my  
19 work, it made me more confident. I was able to be  
20 more assertive about my rights, like getting breaks  
21 and asking for more pay. And that also changed my  
22 relationship with my boss. In my own life, I am  
23 proud of myself.

24       I encourage you to read the full testimony to  
25 hear about Mohini's growth at Adhikaar.

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Access to life saving information has always been a struggle for our community. For 15 years we filled that gap. Adhikaar was at the epicenter of the COVID-19 crisis. I five months, we talked to 3,100 members directly, including EFE participants, served over 2,500 immigrant workers. We created a 15 part series that reached 205,000 viewers to help them access lifesaving city and city resources. We look for being a physical hub to 100 percent virtual and we took the challenge on to educate a lot of our limited digital literacy members on how to use online resources like Zoom. Now, we are actually piloting an EFE class online. We will continue to expand this as we see how the pilot goes.

To date we have only received \$10,000 in the last 15 years to do this work. We are asking that you all trust CBO's like ours and increase the funding for CBO's for adult literacy and digital literacy including \$100,000 to Adhikaar.

We submit this testimony to represent nearly 5,000 members in our community. We may not know how long this pandemic -

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

1  
2 PABITRA BENJAMIN: Will continue but we know it  
3 is increasing, the needs are increasing in our  
4 community. Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
6 I would like to now welcome Ravi Reddi to testify.  
7 You may begin when you are ready.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

9 RAVI REDDI: I want to thank Committee Chair  
10 Menchaca for holding this important conversation on  
11 this serious issue. We see allies and we are  
12 thankful for our partners on the City Council and in  
13 MOIA.

14 I am Ravi Reddi and I am the Associate Director  
15 for Advocacy and Policy at the Asian American  
16 Federation. First, some context because when it  
17 comes to the Asian American Community our immigrants  
18 and the digital divide, the context present the  
19 challenge within itself.

20 In our community, the COVID-19 pandemic has  
21 resulted in a 35 percent increase in deaths compared  
22 to the five-year average and our recently released  
23 report shows that our community has been hit harder  
24 by unemployment than any other in our city.

1  
2 This is also set against the backdrop of a 2019,  
3 Asian poverty rate of 14 percent in our city and  
4 among seniors is 23 percent.

5 As Council Member Menchaca mentioned, a  
6 significant portion of our community has limited  
7 English proficiency as well.

8 So, first and foremost, amidst a pandemic that  
9 has exacerbated existing community-wide mental health  
10 issues, telehealth has been an adaptation our  
11 community service providers have embraced and that  
12 our City and State have graciously supported. But  
13 during AAF roundtables with mental health service  
14 providers, we continue to hear serious concerns about  
15 providing mental health services that require  
16 unaffordable or inaccessible devices, high English  
17 proficiency, above average technical know-how and/or  
18 a stable internet connection. For these telehealth  
19 initiatives to reach their full potential, they must  
20 first reach the people who are at once most in need  
21 for these services and the least likely to have  
22 access to them.

23 And the digital divide truly reveals itself when  
24 it comes to our seniors who are isolated due to the  
25



1  
2 pandemic, language limitations and a frightening rise  
3 in anti-Asian violence.

4 Many service providers are limited to conducted  
5 services over the phone. A significant limitation  
6 when it comes to teaching ESL and citizenship classes  
7 our conducting mental health check-ins. Many of our  
8 seniors are also immigrants. A population whom the  
9 Trump Administration has done everything in its power  
10 to ostracize and isolate and in our community, our  
11 most vulnerable don't have affordable internet.

12 The low connectivity rate was a significant  
13 concern during Census outreach but it extends in  
14 accessing critical government services, our immigrant  
15 community members deserve and qualify for.

16 So, if tech applications are a necessity for our  
17 community members, they absolutely must be created  
18 with the user in mind. In our community, as in many  
19 of your districts that is more often than not,  
20 someone who has limited English proficiency and/or  
21 limited access to technology.

22 So, here are recommendations. The city must  
23 continue to support new telehealth service providers  
24 and improve its training offerings for providers and  
25

1  
2 community members, alike, on telehealth programming  
3 and medical portals.

4       Secondly, our partners, especially our smaller  
5 service providers need funding and they need  
6 technological assistance while they are bridging the  
7 digital divide in our community. We need help  
8 getting devices and know how to train our most  
9 vulnerable and culturally competent ways, so they can  
10 receive services as they need them.

11       It is on us to make sure our most vulnerable have  
12 access to the services they are entitled to and city  
13 support for ongoing work amongst our service  
14 providers is critical to that end.

15       Finally, we need Local Law 30 regarding language  
16 access to be fully funded and implemented across city  
17 enterprise beyond 311 and language lines. In  
18 addition to amending contacts -

19       SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

20       RAVI REDDI: To allow Asian led nonprofits to  
21 lead with their culture and language expertise and  
22 work with our community.

23       So, on behalf of the Asian American Federation, I  
24 want to thank you for letting us speak with you on  
25 this important subject. The work is difficult but we

1  
2 are driven by the continued need in our community by  
3 the need for greater solutions and your allyship.

4 Thank you.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

6 I would like to welcome Jeehae Fischer to testify.

7 You may begin when you are ready.

8 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now. ]

9 JEEHAE FISCHER: I would like to thank the City

10 Council and the Committee on Immigration and Youth

11 Services for this opportunity to testify. My name is

12 Jeehae Fischer, the Executive Director of the Korean

13 American Family Service Center KAFSC.

14 KAFSC provides social services to immigrant

15 survivors and their children who are affected by

16 domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse.

17 All our programs and services are offered in a

18 culturally and linguistically appropriate setting.

19 Our clients are among the most vulnerable in

20 crisis like the one we are facing right now because

21 of the social distancing guidelines and other safety

22 measures being enforced due to the COVID-19, our

23 survivors and their children are trapped at home with

24 their abusers and face additional violence and

25 challenges.

1  
2           98 percent of our clients are immigrants or  
3 recently arrived immigrants who have language and  
4 cultural challenges navigating the US system. Over  
5 95 percent of our clients live under the poverty line  
6 and are facing not only the violence at their own  
7 homes but also as immigrant victims, they face a set  
8 of other challenges, such as language and cultural  
9 barriers.

10           Thanks to the City Council and their support in  
11 our adult literacy program, we are able to provide  
12 the English classes and other workforce development  
13 services and they are vital. Not only do they learn  
14 how to speak English but they learn how to be better  
15 equipped to obtain employment, access to resources  
16 and public benefits that are available to them. And  
17 ultimately living as self-sufficient members of  
18 society.

19           Many of our survivors are digitally illiterate  
20 especially those who are elders. Our clients just  
21 can't simply navigate the digital system to be able  
22 to receive online counseling and other resources that  
23 are available to them. As most of our clients live  
24 under the poverty line, they share digital devices  
25 with other family members which means that access to

1  
2 the digital devices like smartphones, laptops,  
3 computers is simply limited.

4 We also witnessed situations where the abusers  
5 control the victims because these devices are all  
6 connected. And because our clients are – this means  
7 that online or tele-counseling is just not an option  
8 for our clients. In addition, as an organization  
9 that runs the afterschool program for the children of  
10 the survivors and immigrant parents, we also have  
11 witnessed that many of our client households only  
12 have one device and the children then have to share  
13 the device for their online learning and navigate the  
14 system on their own, as their parents have language  
15 barriers. And they are unable to communicate  
16 effectively with the teachers and school  
17 administrators.

18 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

19 JEEHAE FISCHER: For this, as an essential  
20 business KAFSC has been open physically since the  
21 pandemic providing in-person services including adult  
22 literacy classes to our clients to ensure that we are  
23 their lifeline during this unprecedented time.

24 We ask the Committee on Immigration and Youth  
25 services to continue supporting the immigrant

1  
2 community by ensuring our services and programs  
3 sustain even during this uncertain time. Thank you.

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
5 I would like to now welcome Selvia Sikder to testify.  
6 You may begin when you are ready.

7 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

8 c Thank you very much. Good afternoon, I would  
9 like to thank Chair Menchaca, Chair Rose, Council  
10 Member Chin, the Committee on Immigration and  
11 Committee on Youth Service for giving me the  
12 opportunity to testify.

13 My name is Selvia Sikder and I am the Program  
14 Director at India Home, which is a nonprofit agency  
15 for South Asian and independent seniors.

16 100 percent of our seniors are foreign born and  
17 80 percent of them have limited English proficiency,  
18 which limits their access to the main stream  
19 services. Despite circumstances regarding COVID-19,  
20 we are reaching more seniors, now than ever before  
21 with the number of targeted services. These are  
22 unprecedented times with unprecedented challenges.  
23 We are more dependent on the technology now than ever  
24 before.

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Based on the needs we transferred our program from in-person to virtual platform. Our seniors are already at high risk of social isolation and even their low level of English proficiency and they also have low levels of digital literacy. As well with rates their social isolation. Often times the conversations that the provider of digital literacy are not framed out with any of the communities and their needs especially for the South Asian immigrant communities.

Some of our seniors have expressed an inability to talk on the computer, usually their family members are not able to ask them for help in getting their devices. However, for the large population that lives alone, they do not have the social support at home to be able to navigate these processes. Also, availability of devices are a large part of the difficulties facing the digital divide.

Many seniors living in multifamily housing situations in which they have to depend on the technical device are family members and seniors who use the government provided cellphones are limited in applications availability restricting them from using WhatsApp and Zoom. It also limits the amount of

1 minutes they can converse and stay socially  
2 connected.

3  
4 Recognizing this myriad of problems these  
5 immigrant senior communities facing in their home and  
6 we have even taken our training to our seniors in  
7 Hindi, Buchalati and Bengali. This is personalized  
8 one on one so that the seniors are given the  
9 undivided attention that is needed.

10 We also provide weekly online ESL classed so  
11 seniors are able to connect themselves with the  
12 language needed to navigate basic technology. Also,  
13 we send the flyers in our home delivered meal  
14 services, how they can step by step, like it is  
15 written step by step how they can download the Zoom  
16 in Bengali, India and Buchalati. Given these  
17 vulnerabilities that that the community is currently  
18 facing, we need the city's help to protect and  
19 include immigrants in its COVID-19 response.

20 Given the high risk for the population [INAUDIBLE  
21 3:15:34]. As such, digital literacy for immigrant  
22 communities, especially for South Asian seniors needs  
23 to be prioritized by the city. We have  
24 recommendations and provide support for the  
25 organization to have IT support.



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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

SELVIA SIKDER: And immigrants have been in organizations such as India Home with the expense funding and recognize our workers as essential and better the serve the vulnerability for the Asian community.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony. At this point, I would like to ask if any Council Members have questions for this panel.

Seeing none, we will move to the next panel. I would now like to welcome Karen Zhou to testify after Karen, we will hear from Xiaoli Qiao, Jennifer Argueta, Tazmin Uddin and Hannah Babiss. Karen Zhou, you may begin when you are ready.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

KAREN ZHOU: Good afternoon everyone. Thank you Chair Menchaca, Chair Rose and Members of the Immigrant Committee for this opportunity to testify today. I hope everyone is staying safe and healthy at this time. My name is Karen Zhou, I am the Executive Director of Homecrest Community Services. We are a multi-social service agency with over two

1  
2 decades of providing community services in Brooklyn,  
3 New York. We operate two large senior center  
4 programs serving Asian immigrant seniors.

5       Due to the pandemic, what started as a remote  
6 experience to shelter in place to contain COVID-19 is  
7 now becoming the new reality for many immigrant  
8 seniors we care for. Because this group is the most  
9 vulnerable to COVID-19, the CDC have continued to  
10 advise for our seniors to stay at home and avoid  
11 social gatherings. As seniors remain isolated at  
12 home, we are concern about their mental and emotional  
13 health without their daily activities to help them  
14 get through their day. Seniors living alone,  
15 particularly under these circumstances will feel  
16 depressed, lonely, hopelessness and scared. So,  
17 maintaining mental health and safety for our seniors  
18 have become a top priority for us.

19       According to the Asian American Federation of New  
20 York's 2016 study, Asian American Seniors in New  
21 York, Asians are the fastest growing senior  
22 population in New York City comprising of 16 percent  
23 of the senior population. In terms of limited  
24 English proficiency, 9 out of 10 Chinese immigrant  
25 seniors can't read or write English fluently. Almost

1  
2 half of the Chinese immigrants never completed high  
3 school. And at our center 98 percent of our seniors  
4 speak Chinese as their primarily language and so when  
5 we started our free ESL adult literacy program for  
6 older adults many years ago, it was well received and  
7 has remained an important ongoing program that we  
8 offer.

9       Since the pandemic, we have had to act nimbly to  
10 pivot our programming from onsite to online  
11 activities so services can be continued  
12 uninterrupted. Like the schools, we offered free  
13 virtual learning and activities for our seniors  
14 throughout the day. Similar to students in public  
15 school, not all of our immigrant seniors have access  
16 to Wi-Fi and many do not have laptops or computers to  
17 be able to go online. So, while technology have  
18 helped play an enormous role during this time of  
19 social distancing to help connect one another  
20 remotely, there still remains a large digital divide  
21 between those with access and those without. This  
22 inequity is unacceptable.

23       We would like to advocate to the city and this  
24 committee to find ways to bridge this gap either by  
25 providing technology funding to senior centers -

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SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time expired.

KAREN ZHOU: Can purchase laptops or iPads as well as supporting funding to provide Wi-Fi accessibility for both seniors and students who many because of income lack the ability to afford Wi-Fi services on their own.

On behalf of Homecrest Community Services, I thank you for your time and consideration in my testimony today.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.

I would now like to welcome Xiaoli Qiao to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

XIAOLI QIAO: Good morning everyone. My name is Xiaoli Qiao, I am the Program Director of Adult Literacy at the YWCA of Queens. I am very happy to be here today to testify how our adult literacy services have impacted our immigrant community during the pandemic.

We serve around 500 clients every year. Due to the impact of COVID-19, all of our classes have been moved online. I still remember how frustrated our senior were back in March because a lot of them were not tech savvy, but they were afraid of losing their

1  
2 opportunities to learn English. Our teachers had to  
3 put a lot of effort in to teach them not only English  
4 but also how to navigate the technology. It was  
5 extremely challenging in the beginning. However, as  
6 time goes on, things have changed. Our students,  
7 especially the senior students started to enjoy the  
8 new technology and eager to learn more. They learned  
9 how to control their speakers and cameras. They  
10 became so excited when they finally figured out how  
11 they could share the pictures with classmates.

12 Today, I actually would like to share with a  
13 letter that I received from one of my ESL students.  
14 Her name is Clara and she is 75-years-old. In the  
15 letter, she said, "Previously, I did not know what  
16 Zoom was or how to use it. Now I know. I know how  
17 to take my homework from email and send it back to my  
18 teacher. Not only my English is improving and at the  
19 same time, I even learned how to send cute Emojis to  
20 my grandson on my phone. This is a big deal for me.  
21 My grandson is proud of me and I can feel that I am a  
22 cool grandma."

23 As the program director, when I read the letter  
24 for the first time, I am so proud of my teachers  
25 because they have put so much effort in and it was

1  
2 not easy but I am more proud of the students because  
3 they never give up and they learned so much more than  
4 we expected. The literacy services are extremely  
5 important especially in the pandemic, to be  
6 communicated in the community together.

7 So, I am so grateful for DYCD's consistent  
8 support to the community and I look forward to be  
9 able to serve more people with more help from all of  
10 you. Thank you.

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

14 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

15 JENNIFER ARGUETA: Good afternoon Chair and  
16 Council Members. My name is Jennifer Argueta and I  
17 am the Program Manager of Adult Education at Northern  
18 Manhattan Improvement Corporation or NMIC.

19 On behalf of NMIC, we thank you for hearing our  
20 testimony today about adult education in New York  
21 City. NMIC's mission is to serve as a catalyst for  
22 positive change in the lives of people in our  
23 community on their paths to secure and prosperous  
24 features. Our education and career services  
25 department aims to move people from a point of crisis

1  
2 to self sufficiency through education programs that  
3 provide ESL and High School Equivalency instruction  
4 and vocational training programs that offer industry  
5 recognized credentials and job placement services.

6 In Fiscal Year '19, NMIC served more than 700  
7 students in our adult education program and more than  
8 180 opportunity youth in our young adult programs.

9 Across all of our programs, NMIC helped 46 community  
10 residents achieve their diplomas. More than 200 of  
11 our ESL students made an academic gain. 79 of our  
12 young adult participants enter jobs while 14 more  
13 entered college for an advanced training program.

14 Since the public health crisis, NMIC transitioned  
15 its program to exist in a fully remote world. This  
16 not only meant redesigning our programs to be  
17 operated digitally but it also meant providing  
18 resources to community members that until now,  
19 haven't engaged in a digital world.

20 Our programs are vital for students, like  
21 Isabelle who became a young parent during high  
22 school. She did not finish her education. She took  
23 the test in January and passed all but two subjects.  
24 So, she was scheduled to test again in March but her  
25 test was cancelled due to the pandemic. NMIC staffed

1  
2 worked with Isabelle to navigate the pathways created  
3 by New York State Education Department and obtained  
4 her diploma in June. Which she wouldn't have been  
5 able to achieve without NMIC's assistance.

6 Isabelle is now assisting her daughter to do  
7 online learning and she is anxiously waiting to start  
8 college. We have seen repeatedly in history that the  
9 best path out of crisis is to invest more in people,  
10 not less. We call for no further cuts to adult  
11 education and youth services and a restoration of  
12 funds that have already been slashed. We have the  
13 responsibility and the opportunity to demonstrate our  
14 values as a city by collecting tax revenue from those  
15 who can afford it and using it to uplift our  
16 communities by supporting community based  
17 programming.

18 I want to thank you for your time today for  
19 letting me speak.

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
21 I would now like to welcome Tazmin Uddin to testify.  
22 You may begin when you are ready.

23 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

24 TAZMIN UDDIN: Thank you. Good afternoon, my  
25 name is Tazmin Uddin and I am the Youth Program



1 Director at Turning Point for Women and Families.

2 Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

3 Turning Point is for women and families in 2004 as  
4 the first nonprofit to address domestic violence in  
5 New York City's Muslim community.

6 Since 2016, Turning Point for Women and Families  
7 has offered senior Muslim women in Queens ESL classes  
8 geared towards passing the citizenship exam. When  
9 the COVID-19 pandemic hit and we started working from  
10 home, our seniors insisted that we continue to offer  
11 English classes. Due to our seniors limited access  
12 to technology and devices, since March 2019, we have  
13 been offering our seniors classes via conference  
14 line. It is not an easy feat and yet, on average 20  
15 seniors attend each class per week and over the last  
16 two months the citizenship [LOST AUDIO 3:27:02].

17 While these are successes we celebrate, we  
18 recognize that the visual element of learning is  
19 absent due to the digital divide and this is  
20 impacting our quality of service. One of our seniors  
21 who took the citizenship test answered all of the  
22 questions but had trouble with the written portion  
23 since it is an area we were not able to practice as  
24 much.  
25

1  
2 Closing the digital divide is crucial to our  
3 seniors and immigrant communities. If our seniors  
4 had access to tablets and laptops, similar to the  
5 ones provided by schools to their students, the  
6 quality of their education would be better. Access  
7 to these devices would also allow more seniors to  
8 benefit from our services.

9 It is important to note that for our seniors,  
10 access to technology in our classes are not just  
11 about learning English. It is about the senior who  
12 attended our class or who passed the citizenship exam  
13 and registered to vote. It's about the senior who  
14 came to our class and with the metro card we provided  
15 her learned to use public transit by herself.

16 It is about the senior who came to class and felt  
17 empowered to go to her doctors appointment and  
18 communicate independently with her doctor.

19 Our English classes are the reason that every  
20 year our seniors commute from Jamaica to the steps of  
21 City Hall to take part in AP Advocacy Day, to  
22 advocate for more funding for our Asian Pacific  
23 Islander community.

24 Community based organizations like ours take the  
25 opportunity to teach English and utilize it to

1  
2 maximize the benefit for our community. Our classes  
3 serve as an entry point for seniors to learn English.  
4 To learn their rights, to receive counseling for  
5 elder abuse and emotional support. Become empowered  
6 and become into greater members of society.

7 We implore each of you on the committee to look  
8 into funding to provide those of us offering  
9 educational service to our immigrant communities with  
10 the resources and devices to close the digital divide  
11 and make learning accessible to all. Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
13 I would now like to turn to Hannah Babiss. You may  
14 begin when you are ready.

15 SERGEANT AT ARMS: Time starts now.

16 HANNAH BABISS: Good morning and thank you for  
17 the opportunity to testify today. My name is Hannah  
18 Babiss and I am a Master of Social Work Student at  
19 Fordham University. Additionally, I have been  
20 teaching English to speakers of other languages for  
21 over four years. As a higher education student and  
22 an ESOL teacher, I have seen first-hand the impacts  
23 that English proficiency can provide for individuals,  
24 families and communities.

1  
2 I would like to start off by sharing a personal  
3 story. In 2017, I was working at the University of  
4 Ibague in Colombia, which is where I met Daniela.  
5 Daniela was a 16-year-old high school student, who  
6 took intermediate English classes on the weekends, at  
7 the University. One day told me that her dream was  
8 to go to a University in England and study medicine  
9 but that it was too expensive.

10 After I learned about this, I began working with  
11 Daniela to look into opportunities for scholarships.  
12 We researched universities together in England and I  
13 tutored her IELTS English proficiency exam. After  
14 months of preparing, Daniela was ready to apply. In  
15 2019, Daniela was admitted to Birkbeck College of  
16 Medicine and continues to study and live in London.

17 The impacts that English proficiency had on  
18 Daniela's life was certainly extraordinary but is not  
19 by any means an isolated experience. Teachers in  
20 general provide so much more than just classes. They  
21 bring communities together and create access to  
22 social services. Now, more than ever, during the  
23 COVID-19 global pandemic a community space such as a  
24 classroom and support from community members such as  
25 teachers is imperative.

1  
2       During this global crisis, New York City English  
3 teachers have connected their students to get access  
4 to recourses like free food, information on their  
5 children's public schools, and so much more. As a  
6 social worker, teacher and a community member, I  
7 firmly believe that ESOL classes provide supportive  
8 services and integrate students into the community.  
9 If you are in agreement with this statement and  
10 believe that it is important for individuals to  
11 remain connected with their community, I ask that  
12 city funded adult literacy programs are fully  
13 restored this year. Thank you.

14       COMMITTEE COUNSEL: Thank you for your testimony.  
15 I will now ask if any Council Members have questions  
16 for this panel.

17       Seeing no hands, this concludes our public  
18 testimony. If we have inadvertently missed anyone  
19 that is registered to testify today and has yet to be  
20 called, please use the Zoom raise hand function now  
21 and you will be called on in the order that you have  
22 raised your hand.

23       Seeing no hands, I am going turn it over to Chair  
24 Menchaca and Chair Rose for closing remarks. Chair  
25 Menchaca.

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2           CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank you  
3 Chair Rose and all the Council Members that are here.  
4 I want to speak directly to this last panel, Hannah  
5 and Jennifer and Tazmin. All of you are examples of  
6 our educational infrastructure that is incredibly  
7 important and often times forgotten. You are doing  
8 right now what so many teachers are doing for our  
9 young people in holding this shift and this pivot and  
10 this crisis moment for people who need education to  
11 give access to the services that we need.

12           I am also Co-Chairing a hearing at the same time  
13 over here on my right on the Census and the Supreme  
14 Court just made a decision to change the date sooner,  
15 so that on October 16<sup>th</sup> on Friday at 6 a.m., they  
16 will shutdown the Census operation. Giving the Trump  
17 Administration that ability to do that.

18           How then do we communicate that to communities  
19 and what languages and everything that you speak to  
20 in these moments require us to have that kind of  
21 trust and relationship and ability to communicate to  
22 our communities and you are doing that. And every  
23 time I meet a teacher, every time I meet a teacher in  
24 general but especially the adult literacy teachers,  
25 there is something really special that's happening.

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You are communicating with essential workers. You are communicating with families that want better for their children, that will sacrifice their own education and I am thinking about my own mother, for the education of their kids.

What we need is a plan for all of that to be resourced and respected and I just want to say thank you for that work and what I heard today is that there is so much the city can do to build infrastructure for that kind of access to this education. Laptops, Wi-Fi, and then also just making this whole system healthier with paying you what you deserve. And if we are going to move into a whole new recovery plan, this is where we need to invest money.

And so, thank you so much for your time and your effort. This was a long hearing but it was important for us to hear that and I hope that we can keep doing right by you and the coalition as a whole as Council Members who are on the budget negotiating team and have the power of the people through our legislative and budget powers.

So, thank you so much for your time and I will hand it over to Council Member and Chair Rose.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON ROSE: Thank you again Chair Menchaca  
3 for convening such an important hearing on such an  
4 important issue. You have articulated you know, very  
5 well what the issue are. What's at stake and how  
6 important it is that we ensure that this population,  
7 the immigrant population, our adults who are in need  
8 of literacy services have not only access to it but  
9 that we ensure that the resources, the level of  
10 resources are there that would require for them to be  
11 able to maintain. You know, in the admin of COVID  
12 where we are dealing with isolation and so many  
13 uncertainties, it really is important that we are  
14 able to maintain contact and to be able to deliver  
15 services.

16 So, I want to thank you again Chair Menchaca. I  
17 want to thank the advocates. I want to thank the  
18 educators who work so diligently to make sure that  
19 all of the residents of New York City are able to  
20 function and participate in the life of this city as  
21 productive citizens.

22 So, I again, I applaud all of you and I thank you  
23 for attending this hearing.  
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COMMITTEE ON IMMIGRATION JOINTLY WITH  
COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES

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CHAIRPERSON MENCHACA: Thank you Chair Rose.  
More to come and this hearing is now ended. Thank  
you. [GAVEL]

C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date October 31, 2020