

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

Committee on Immigration-Preliminary
Budget Hearing

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HELD AT: REMOTE HEARING VIRTUAL ROOM 1

B E F O R E: CHAIR CARLOS MENCHACA

COUNCIL MEMBERS: Carlos Menchaca
Daniel Dromm
Farah N. Louis
Francisco Moya
Margaret Chin
Mathieu Eugene

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

Bitta Mostofi
Ann Montesano
Yasmine Farhang
Veronica Piedra Leon
Yesenia Mata
Manuel Castro
Nadia Molina
Sarahi Marquez
Ligia Guallpa
Alba Lucero Villa
Ira Yankwitt
Manal Joud
Christine Heo
Eun Ha Grace Lee
Christine Lee
Iris Shry-Chen
Myong Hee Sung
Mi Ok Oh
Ravi Reddi
Erick Agarijo
Maya Gurung
Lakshmi Sanmuganathan
Shaaranya Pillai
Carlyn Cowen
Ellen Pachnanda
Sarah Deri Oshiro
Hasan Shafiqullah
Jodi Ziesemer
Terry Lawson

Mario Russell
Melissa C. Peterson
Jojo Annobil
Alexandra Rizio
Mia Soto
Maggie Wong
Mon Yuck Yu
Sienna Fontaine
Nicole Rojas
Ernie Collette
Henry Lajara
Charlene Obernauer
Tito Sinha
Gianina Enriquez
Cole Dennis

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SGT. LUGO: PC recording done.

SGT. SADOWSKI: Recording to the cloud
all set.

SGT. PEREZ: Backup is rolling.

SGT LUGO: Thank you. Sgt. Hope, you may
take it away with the opening.

SGT. HOPE: Thank you. Good morning.

Good morning and welcome to the New York City Council
preliminary budget hearing for the fiscal year 2022
on the Committee on Immigration. At this time, will
all panelists please turn on your videos. I repeat,
all panelist, please turn on your videos. Thank you.
To minimize disruption, please, please all electronic
devices to vibrate or silent mode. If you wish to
submit testimony, you may do so at
testimony@council.nyc.gov. I repeat,
testimony@council.nyc.gov. Chair Menchaca, we are
ready to begin.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Buenos dias everyone,
and good morning to everyone. It is good to see your
faces today as we begin the FY22 preliminary budget
Committee on Immigration, today on March 8th. I want
to begin with an opening statement. My name is
Carlos Menchaca, Chair of the Committee on

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Immigration. Today, we are focused on the Mayor's fiscal 2022 preliminary plan as it relates to Immigration services. This includes funding for the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs as well as several initiatives, that together, compromise the city's sanctuary systems. Before we begin, I want to offer some reflections. When I first started my role as Immigration Chair back in 2014 in my first term, there was no budget hearing. They gave this Committee the ability to have a role and responsibility of oversight during the budget negotiations. We fixed that. Over the last years, this Committee, it's Members and community activists, families, young people, organizations have joined the Council in keeping the Mayoral Administration and the agencies that execute the vision of the budget accountable. As the state budget closes on April 1st, I am reminded that we must call upon the state to create an Immigration Committee with budget oversight in Albany, and that should spread across the entire country. Every legislative body must feel compelled to do what we are doing here in New York, and what you are participating today here in New York City. Last year, during the height of the pandemic,

the Council stood strong and defended the vast majority of Immigration funding against the Mayor's misplaced austerity, but we failed to defund the NYPD which received the lion share of last year's budget and reinvest that money back into programs and services that would have made our city safer and healthier than it is now. The call to defund NYPD was a call for accountability. A call for a budget that reflected the priorities and our principals of our most vulnerable neighbors. One of those priorities is a city that does not cooperate with ICE, that instead seeks to dismantle and disentangle ourselves from a system designed to criminalize and deport the very New Yorkers who kept us fed in our economy and kept the economy going during the pandemic. It is these New Yorkers, the domestic workers, the day laborers, the delivery riders, the telebristas, the laundry workers, the street venders, restaurant owners, taxi driver, who did the essential work to protect us, and yet, continue to struggle harder than any other New Yorker. That is why this year's budget is more consequential than last year. Last year was an emergency budget. This year, there are no excuses. It falls to the Council to exercise

its power in the name of justice. The rise in anti-Asian rhetoric and hate crimes is no accident. Anti-Asian racism has been in this country long before the pandemic, but what hurts the most is knowing that so many cases go unreported because of language barriers or fears about drawing attention to an immigration status. It's hard to give a one size fits all solution, but more policing is definitely not the answer. We don't need to over-criminalize our communities to keep them safe. What we need, is to build trust by removing language barriers, investing in social services, and assisting the survivors of crime, assaults, and all our businesses in our corridors. That is how we will build the social solidarity necessary to undo decades of scapegoating and stereotypes. I look forward to hearing how the city plans to address these needs of our Asian American New Yorkers, a community that has traditionally been underfunded by the City of New York, despite being one of its fastest growing segments. As it stands, the fiscal year 2022 preliminary budget does not adequately address the needs of our immigrant New Yorkers. While the Administration funding for major initiative such as

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Action NYC and IDNYC are included in the budget, major priorities of the Council and the Administration has funded this year are missing in this budget such as 16.6 million dollars for NIFA, 9.8 million dollars for the Adult Literacy Expansion, and 4 million dollars for ICARE and 3.2 million dollars for CUNY Citizenship Now, just to name a few. This Committee is interested in hearing how MOIA, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and the Administration as a whole looked to prioritize services for immigrants and how the city plans to ensure that these vital services are funded in fiscal year 22 and beyond. In addition, the fiscal year 22 preliminary budget does not address a major issue that this Committee and Council have raised that is now undeniable due to COVID, the need for adequate language access. The Administration's obligation under Local Law 30 of 2017 is to provide language access to all, including interpretation and translation for city services. The pandemic has shown us that language access is literally a matter of life and death. In fact, immigrants who speak language other than English, were more likely to contact the virus than their neighbors because of

language barriers. Requests for translations service have almost doubled in response to COVID-19. The need to create a language interpreter bank is now more important than ever. Not only for getting the right information to immigrants, but also to send a signal that we care about every New Yorker. New York City must take that step up and fully comply with Local Law 30. This priority must be reflected in our budget and Committee, this Committee, the Immigration Committee looks forward to hearing from MOIA on how do we get this done. Another major way that the Administration can help our immigrant New Yorkers is addressing taxi medallions. This is a crisis, a crisis that this Council has known for years. Yellow cab driving used to be an attractive job for immigrants who have access to driving a taxi or limo or can do so even if they are limited English proficiency. Unfortunately, New York City taxi medallions is in crisis and many largely immigrant drivers remain drowning in their debt and that has compounded by the Coronavirus pandemic. In 2018, nine taxi drivers in New York died by suicide, crushed by the financial pressure of debts owed to their medallions. With large monthly mortgage

1 payments for their medallions, many owner drivers
2 lost their homes, suffered health complications, and
3 their children could no longer afford college. Thus,
4 it's important during these times that the
5 administration and the City Council together continue
6 to lead the way in making our taxi driver's needs
7 met. Now, we heard directly from many of these
8 drivers, just recently, both as Chair of the
9 Immigration Committee and Council Member Chen as
10 Chair of the Asian Committee. Finally, it has been
11 less than two months since President Biden was sworn
12 in and we have seen some positive changes that will
13 improve some of the draconian immigration policies
14 specifically and very dramatically different from the
15 previous Administration. This Committee looks
16 forward to hearing about the impact related to the
17 executive orders, the US Citizenship Act of 2021, and
18 other Federal policies that will improve the living
19 conditions of our neighbors, our immigrant neighbors,
20 and the support needed to implement those changes
21 here at a local level. I want to make sure that we
22 thank our Committee staff for their incredible work
23 on this and all of the budget hearings as we worked
24 on them together over the years. Financial Analysis
25

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Florentine Gabor (SP?), Unit Head Crilian Francisco
(SP?), Committee Council Harbani Ahuja, Policy
Analyst Elizabeth Cronk (SP?), Community Liaison
Stella Chen (SP?), my Chief of Staff Lauren Alucero
(SP?), and Communications Director Tony Churito
(SP?). I want to hand it over to the Council
Committee Harbani Ahuja to over some of the
procedural items and swear in the Administration as
we begin to hear from them. Thank you all.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank
you Chair. My name is Harbani Ahuja, and I'm Council
to the Committee on Immigration for the New York
Council. Before we begin, I want to remind everyone
that you will be on mute until you are called on to
testify when you will be unmuted by the host. I will
be periodically calling on panelist to testify.
Please listen for your name to be called. I will be
announcing who the next panelist will be. For
everyone testifying today, please note that there may
be a few seconds of delay before you are unmuted, and
we thank you in advance for your patience. All
hearing participants should submit written testimony
to testimony@council.nyc.gov. At today's hearing,
the first panel will be representatives from the

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Administration, followed by Council Member questions, and then the public will testify. During the hearing, if Council Members would like to ask a question, please use the Zoom raise hand function and I will call on you in the order in which you have raised your hands. I will now call on Members of the Administration to testify. Testimony will be provided by the Bitta Mostofi, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. Additionally, the following representatives will be available for answering questions, Yasmine Farhang, Senior Advisor for Legal Initiatives at the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs and Ann Montesano, Executive Director of Interagency Initiatives and Language Access at the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. Before we begin, I will administer the Oath. Commissioner Mostofi, Yasmine Farhang, and Ann Montesano. I will call on you each individually for a response. Please raise your right hands. Do you affirm to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony before this Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member questions? Commissioner Mostofi?

COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: I do.

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COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank
you. Yasmine Farhang?

YASMINE FARHANG: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank
you. Ann Montesano?

ANN MONTESANO: I do.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank
you. Commissioner, you may begin your testimony when
you are ready.

COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Thank you, good
afternoon. Thank you to Chairs Dromm and Menchaca
and the Committee on Finance and Immigration for
holding this budget hearing. My name is Bitta
Mostofi. I'm the Commissioner for New York City's
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, and I want to
start by reiterating the mission of our office which
is really to promote the wellbeing of immigrant
communities by recommending policies and programs
that facilitate the successful inclusion of
immigrants across our city and our civic economic and
cultural life. MOIA works to fulfill this mission by
partnering with city agencies to support immigrants
and to ensure that they can access city services and
information that they need regardless of their

immigration status and ability to speak or understand English. MOIA also ensures that immigrants, including immigrating and vulnerable populations have access to legal services and information that they need to exercise their rights to stabilize their immigration status. Last, but not least, as a Mayor's Office, we work to make sure that the city's voice is heard at state, national, and international discussions about immigrant rights and integration. Starting last year, New York City has faced unprecedented health, economic, and social crises which has revealed and exacerbated underlying inequities and injustices. In order to address these issues, we've primarily focused on three areas in this past fiscal year. First, we focused on combating inequity and address the impact of COVID-19 on our communities. Second, we focused on institutionalizing some of our legal services work and programs, and finally, it has been particularly important this year for MOIA to work to empower our communities through our advocacy outreach and information sharing about critical services and needs. This testimony will briefly outline the challenges that we face, how we work to address them

and modify them, and end with our discussions into the next year. As I previously testified and as revealed through our own research and data, COVID-19 has had a disproportionate effect on our communities. The pandemic has devastated immigrant communities and forced all service providers to pivot away from in-person services. The Federal response was slow to be kind, inequitable, and lacking inadequate support for local government. Even when the Federal Government finally provided the level of relief for local communities, it excluded undocumented immigrants and initially mixed status households. At the same time, the Trump Administration worked in the final year to make the immigration system a furtherance of its anti-immigrant and racist agenda. First, they continued to prevent many immigrants from stabilizing their status and obtaining citizenship by exclusively prioritizing white, wealthy, and highly educated immigrants while neglecting the duty to support those fleeing humanitarian crises. Second, the Trump Administration and its officials worked to undermine longstanding state and local policies aimed at building trust with immigrants and looked to discourage immigrants from seeking the public

benefits and services that they are very often entitled to, and finally the Federal Government seized on the pandemic to justify its attack on immigrants and abandoned obligations to meet the basic needs to those in detention. This year and its challenges forced us to pivot our work to respond to the realities including by working to fill gaps left by an incomplete federal relief package and public benefit system. As the city looked to its own response to the COVID-19 crisis, we worked to ensure that New Yorkers had access to the help that they needed. As I testified in September, initially we partnered with the Open Society Foundation and the Mayor's Fund to create the New York City COVID-19 Emergency Relief Effort and Program to provide direct payments between \$400 and \$1000 to over 24,000 New Yorkers which benefited them and their 52,000 people in their homes. With an additional support of 1.5 million dollars from the Robin Hood Foundation, we were able to reach an additional 3000 people, 1000 recipients, and more than 2000 folks in their households for a total of 79,000 individuals and their family members through this initiative. We also worked with the Mayor's Fund and HRA to secure

1.5 million dollars in private funding to support New Yorkers regardless of their status to receive assistance to pay funeral expenses for their loved one, recognizing the respect and dignity that every person should have. The Immigrant COVID-19 Burial Assistance Program helped to address the exclusion of some families from the state and city's pre-existing program. In response to the urgent need for Housing Relief among New Yorkers who were left out of Federal relief, we partnered with CSF and HPB on Project Parachute which is a coalition of property owners, nonprofits, and city agencies that have been committed to helping New Yorkers, again, that have been left out of these packages or longstanding benefit systems. In 2020, Project Parachute launched FASTEN, Funds and Services for Tenants Experiencing Need which provides eviction prevention service and financial resources to New Yorkers regardless of immigration status. The program has 10 million dollars from various private funders, and we aim to raise 15 million in total to help people pay their rent. Additionally, the city with MOIA as a partner has worked to ensure that programming and support provided for emergency food and health services in

response to COVID and the tremendous investments in those areas are inclusive and accessible for all New Yorkers regardless of immigration status. MOIA has also shifted its own programming and assisted agency partners to ensure that vital city service remain accessible during the pandemic that includes language access work I testified more extensively to November, including the extensive interagency partnerships we have strengthened through that effort. MOIA itself has expanded our own languages services work with the Administration investing almost 1.2 million for our language services efforts over the last fiscal year. This investment provided (inaudible) with our inhouse language services more than doubling its translation work in the last calendar year, on top of staying an almost six-fold increase in telephonic interpretation. The past language services contact expenditures which do not in total, include the Department of Education, Health and Hospitals, nor the New York Police Department or small business purchases have doubled since the start of the Diblasio Administration with a total expenditure of 8.3 million this last year. We've also adjusted our other programming to respond to the needs of the

1 pandemic. For IDNYC, which was funding for 18
2 million in fiscal year 2021, we were first to shut
3 down permanent sites at the peak of the pandemic and
4 in response, the program extended the renewal period
5 available to New Yorkers, launched a renewal by phone
6 team, and reopened sites beginning in September.
7 Currently, the program has four public enrollment
8 centers by March, so starting this week, we will host
9 four additional pop-up locations, and IDNYC has
10 launched three passive locations in September that
11 are located at HRA locations to support SNAP and cash
12 assistance clients. As another example in the last
13 year, We Speak New York Programming was held online
14 and featured COVID-19 resources that could be
15 accessed by immigrant learners. Nevertheless, with a
16 budget of approximately \$745,000, We Speak has
17 expanded the reach of its materials and curricula
18 through various new partnerships including our
19 partnership with the division of multi-lingual
20 learners at the Department of Education and together
21 with DOE's DML team, We Speak was able to disseminate
22 300,000 resources in schools in multilanguage along
23 with digital information and materials to principals,
24 educators, parent coordinators, and counselors.
25

Given the increased reliability on digital tools, We Speak also updated its website to add a chat box tool to help answer questions for people on services in different languages and how to navigate the website itself. Finally, We Speak also focused on recovery planning for a deeper evaluation of our Work First initiative with the New Women New Yorkers with hope of scaling this model if proved effective. MOIA has partnered with H&H to address ongoing and exacerbated healthcare disparities in the city through NYC Care. With our outreach partners expected to be funded at a total of 5.6 million since the program launched. NYC Care completed its citywide rollout four months ahead of schedule by launching in Manhattan and Queens in August of 2020, and as of December 31st, NYC Care outreach partners reached more than 173,000 unique community members and the program has proudly enrolled more than 50,000 New Yorkers across all five boroughs. In the legal services space, our attention was on ensuring that immigration legal services remained safe and accessible while identifying emerging and shifting needs. Our Action NYC services were conducted remotely beginning in March of 2020 and throughout the remainder of the year. However,

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work to fully institutionalize Action NYC as a city funded service continued. In June 2020, MOIA, along with our partners at DSS HRA selected 22 immigrant legal service providers including our Consertia partners across the five boroughs for awards totaling 60 million to provide Action NYC services under a two and half contract through June of 2023 with an optional three-year extension. The selected CDOs are uniquely positioned to meet community specific needs due to their immigration legal expertise, strong local ties, and cultural and linguistic competence, and will serve immigrant communities that have been historically under represented and hard to reach. MOIA also responded to additional needs exposed by the pandemic by expanding funding for some of our legal services programs. In 2020, as a result of the pandemic, we secured \$150,000 in additional funding for the Rapid Response Legal collaborative which serves individuals who are at risk of immediate deportation and cannot be served by other forms of legal service available. This additional funding helped alleviate the high needs for legal service for New Yorkers that continued to be detained by ICE despite the unprecedented risk to their health and

safety during the pandemic. Similarly in April 2020, we allocated funds to replenish a DACA renewal fund initiative, initially launched in January of just over 77,000 with an additional 150,000 which helped over 300 New York City dreamers who needed financial assistance to renew their applications. As we continue to monitor this situation, we realize that New Yorkers were unable to file many other types of applications for immigrant benefits due to the financial constraints of the pandemic. As a result, the original fund was expanded with an infusion of \$300,000 with the help of our Office of Economic Opportunity. In total the fee funds covered the filing cost of over 375 DACA renewals and 160 applications for work authorization and dozens of applications for adjustment of status and naturalization, and approximately 200 for other forms of relief. Through the advocacy of community members and advocates and with support of MOIA, the city also continued to fund the Low-Wage Worker initiative which provides legal assistance on a range of employment based legal matter for vulnerable immigrant New Yorkers. In 2021, the city has invested 2 million and the Council allocated \$120,000

for outreach and education. By maintaining previous funding for legal services, the Low-Wage Worker initiative continues to provide critically needed services to New Yorkers and unemployed New Yorkers as the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis continues. The Low-Wage Worker initiative will provide legal assistance on 1500 to 2000 cases this year. This includes legal advice and complications as well as full representation and advocacy with employers and government agencies through litigation. One of MOIA's most important roles is serving immigrant communities on the ground by sharing information about resources and services in the community and in responding to issues or challenges raised. We work to empower our community member to act on their rights and access benefits available to them. We conduct Know Your Rights programming across our communities and cover different topics utilizing different models to deliver crucial information. IN 2020, we conducted over 700 forums engaging thousands of New Yorkers. In addition to these events, our outreach organizing team also actively communicated with immigrant New Yorkers across a variety of our campaigns, and as MOIA has noted in various

testimonies before this Committee, this outreach is a crucial part of our overall work to provide timely, relevant information to immigrant New Yorkers around city services and programs. Our constituent hotline, another direct point of contact for immigrant New Yorkers across the city remains responsive to the needs of our communities, collecting crucial information about what's available and providing that to New Yorkers to call. In 2020, the team saw its largest number of inquiries in the past few years. As immigrant New Yorkers reached out to MOIA for help during the pandemic. Our team received over 14,000 inquiries, 9000 calls and over 5000 emails, and finally, as I have spoken to many times, we engaged in sustained advocacy at every level government on behalf of immigrant New Yorkers. This includes work with city agencies in supporting litigation, submitting comments on federal regulations and otherwise advocating for immigrants and their families. As we begin to plan for the next fiscal year, a few things are clear. First, the COVID-19 crisis and recovery are paramount. MOIA, along with our sister agencies are deeply involved in vaccine outreach to the immigrant community. More work

surely remains to be done and we look forward to coordinating with agency partners to ensure that every New Yorker can access the vaccine. Second, the change in Federal Administration does not mean our advocacy at the Federal level is complete. In fact, the possibilities presented require us to ensure that not only the Trump Administration's obnoxious immigration policies are dismantled, and even more, that we advance real immigration reform. MOIA is working with partners across the nation to push for a vision for immigration system that addresses the longstanding inequities of this system itself and we will push that vision forward in the coming year. Finally, we are hopeful that the new Federal Administration will work to provide much needed financial relief to the city and our communities. We need collective action at all levels of government to address this crisis. In order to build on the critical work of economic relief that we described and remains our greatest challenge, we must be real commitments at the State and Federal levels to protect immigrant communities with basic needs for survival while seeing the essential contributions of our communities in a fair and equitable recovery for

all. I especially want to urge the state to pass the proposal to tax billionaires in order to fund relief for immigrant workers excluded from Federal relief bills. Thank you again to the Chairs of both Finance and Immigration, Chair Menchaca and Chair Dromm for this important hearing, and I look forward to working with you on many of these crucial issues and answering your questions today.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'm now going to turn it to questions from Chair Menchaca, panelists from the Administration please stay unmuted if possible, during this question-and-answer period. Thank you, Chair Menchaca.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you Commissioner and your team who are here today to answer questions from us, and the Members of the Council who are here, I want to welcome Council Members Dromm, Louis, Moya, and Chin, and I want to ask a few questions, hand it over to Council Member, and then finish off with a few more, and really where I wanted to start with is language access. So, much of my opening and a lot of your testimony focused on language access, and I think that we can see eye-to-eye on what is needed

for true language access across city agencies. The idea of a language bank is not new to us, the Council or you at the Administration or even in conversations within the advocates who proposed this concept of a 2.2 million pilot language interpreter bank, and we called on the Mayor to fund this. Can you give us an update on this specific request and where it sits right now in negotiations from your perspective?

COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Sure, as I testified to in the past, this is a proposal that certainly our office sees as valuable. It's something that we've independently looked at in addition to having conversations with the providers that have put it forward. The one sort of distinction in terms of the proposal itself that we've articulated is the importance and learning that we've saw through some of the small business services efforts on this front in providing a sort of model of shared backend support and administration to new cooperative. So, we have supported that model. We've sort of added to the proposal itself by recommending the inclusion of that sort of backend support and business administration model that we have seen as successful through other cooperative

1 funded efforts, and continued to be in conversation
2 with OMB in that regard, and so, I don't have a new
3 update in terms of current sort of status of this
4 potentially being funded, but just sharing with you
5 that we support this idea and have actually built
6 upon it in recommending sort of a further
7 consideration of a business support and operational
8 CBO funded model.
9

10 CHAIR MENCHACA: Well, and because of
11 the pandemic, this idea that was born pre-pandemic
12 served as a very kind of critical connection to
13 access city services that we fund and then just
14 services for civic engagement across city agencies
15 and the life of an immigrant family. With the
16 pandemic, do you see a role in responsibility for
17 MOIA to inject this concept into the budget that is
18 under COVID that allows for the growth and blossoming
19 of a language bank that can address COVID operations
20 which is separate and different from, I think, what
21 the administration is trying do, and you've
22 articulated that a backend city operation is a way
23 through this, and I think what the language bank is
24 saying, let's hire local community members to be able
25 to be part of this initiative, and would you take

this on with us at the Council level and advocates to pressure a budget allocation from the COVID operations?

COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: So, just to clarify, in terms of the backend system, what I was referring to was previous cooperative models that exists that the city has funded and supported along with the Council include the support of backend city operations, but a backend administrative operation through another not-for-profit. So, for example, the Center for Family Life, Green, I forge the name of the organization, and you can jump in and support me if you recall, who have experience and expertise in how to make sure that our coop is successful because as we've seen time and time again, and we actually consulted at great lengths with other coops, as well as languages services coop which unfortunately folded during the pandemic, to understand what some of their challenges were, and universally, they were less on the skill set of the coop members and more on the administrative business end, and so our recommendation is that in order for such a model to be successful, it requires at least a couple-year support on the administrative business side to get up

and running and to be able to sort of move forward from there. In terms of sort of, a response to the pandemic, look, I think you know, you've heard me certainly speak at great lengths on this issue and I appreciate the attention to how important language services and access are for New Yorkers. I think that the cooperative model is a great one. I also understand it will take time for that model to cement and to be able to be responsive. So, I think we have to be able to do multiple things at once, so that includes storing up as we had talked about, the city's system, the city contracts and the process around language access and in parallel, recognizing the importance of models, like a cooperative model to ensuring the sort of, you know, future ability to recover in a way that's inclusive of the community that has the cultural and linguistic competence, but also those efforts at first success.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Okay, I think the, and I hope that, and I know you will, that MOIA leaves staff to listen to some of the panels that will have a different understanding of what we can do now in response to the emergency and crisis that we're in in the pandemic and how we can really bring resources,

1 and really take what you've laid out as a foundation
2 of support and a consideration of support to
3 actualize that so we can actually build out a
4 multiprong approach that allows community members who
5 are currently right now not being paid, but also
6 interpreting for neighbors, and I think this is part
7 of the moment that allows for a crisis to reveal a
8 need and to cement the current operations that are
9 happening in our communities, especially with, not
10 just the language, but the cultural sensitivity that
11 we're going to need to be able to take the vaccine to
12 the next level in communities that are still are not
13 getting them. So, this is an idea that we're going
14 to continue, but I know with time, I'm going to pause
15 here. I'm going to hand it over to Council Member
16 Chin for questions.

18 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

19 CM CHIN: Thank you, Chair. Thank you,
20 Commissioner for your testimony. One of the things
21 that I really wanted to talk with you about is also
22 the resources and funding for MOIA. I mean, looking
23 at the amount of work that you have to do, and I
24 really want you to be honest with us so that we can
25 help advocate for more support, you know, for MOIA,

for community commission human rights because we had a forum recently on the anti-Asian violence and one of the issues is that yes, we have agencies that can't really help the community by often times, lack of resources. Second is that following what the Chair had talked about, language access. That is something that I always, that I have been advocating for a very long time, even before I was in the City Council. I mean, the idea of having every agency having a language coordinator and having that capacity, I think is critical because what we saw during the pandemic is that a lot of times things get rolled out and it's only in English, not even in Spanish, forget about all the other languages and that's where the frustration is. Department of Health, you know, the whole thing with the vaccine, it was not in other languages. When the Department of Small Business Services wrote out their program to help businesses, it was not in other languages. The application came out only in English. That is not right. I mean, having different languages should be a number one priority that anytime city agencies put out any kind of program, it should be in the multi-lingual. I think in the long run, we have to see

1 that city agencies have to have that capacity, and
2 often times, we see workers and employees who are
3 bilingual are called to do extra duty, and the city
4 has not given an exam for translation and interpreter
5 for many, many years. So, we need a Civil Service
6 exam that really would open the pipeline for
7 employees that can speak different languages. Each
8 agency should have that capacity because often time,
9 when you do translation, if you don't know the
10 program, it's hard to kind of like give the correct
11 information, and we see that happening. So, I think
12 in the long run, we have to really focus on getting
13 the agency, the capacity, and the mindset for
14 language access. It should be the normal, and this
15 is New York City. We have so many different
16 languages that imagine educating our students for
17 people to really value their language and culture and
18 be able to get a job in City Government or State
19 Government, Federal Government utilizing that
20 capacity, that skill that they have. I think that's
21 something that we need to look towards building for
22 the future. So, I really see MOIA, when you were
23 talking about all the different programs that you
24 have worked on, especially during the pandemic, your
25

role as the advocacy role for the immigrant community is greatly appreciated, but we just need to get every city agency to have that capacity to be able to do that. So, I wanted to kind of ask you, like, what is, how effective you getting the other agencies to work with you and to listen you and to really advocate for the resources?

COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah, thank you so much, Council Member Chin as you articulated, you're really, I think, decades long commitment to these issues and to championing ahead of your time how to think about and understand language access. You know, I think, I have testified before, certainly, we'll refrain from going into too much detail about the response to the pandemic in March, and how certainly there tremendous challenges that required immediate sort of, intervention through the task force that we co-chair with that emergency management team as well as directly working with the Department of Health, with SDS, with other agencies to improve and adjust how they were ruling out the language access efforts in the crisis period, right, in light of the sort of need for and necessity for swift turn around. So, to be able to sort of do things at the

same time, and there were definitely challenges and I have spoke to some of the efforts that were untaken to address them and that continue to be looked at.

I'm going to speak to sort of two more, but before doing so, I also want to sort of underscore that we are very much aligned, but it's really critical that the agencies themselves have both the understanding, the priority, and capacity to further this work inhouse. As you noted, we can play the roles that we are playing, we can work to increase or better the way that we do that and how we do that, either, you know, ourselves or working through others or with others, but it's not the same as supplementing the ability for the agency itself to own this work and to drive it forward, so we're very much aligned on that, and it's been a big part of the way we have approached this work. There are two additional efforts that I want highlight that are in process now that I think are important reflecting on how we can do better and the ways that we can better. One is that we're working closely with the Office of Emergency Management and actually connecting the work of the Office with the work our Inner-agency task force to look at sort of what were the challenges in

response and how can we be better situated as a city in the next emergency sort of them moving forward and into recovery efforts and sort of ensuring that through that effort that's taking place, we're bringing into it these issues and these particular lenses. The second that I think is important as I've spoken to before is through the process that we've undertaken around the language access implementation plans, we're now at the stage where, you know, we only had one plan that's been implemented. We're now at the stage where we're working with agencies to revise their plans, and part of that includes addressing challenges that have been revealed over the course of the last year, certainly, but the last two years. That might mean you need more contracts in place, right, that you don't have a system in place that responds effective to an emergency situation. That might be addressing some of the quality issues on translations that have been identified or highlighted and that's through some best practices, that might be through orientation of your websites, right. There are various things that we've working together. We've heard from you, we've heard from community partners, the agencies

themselves are undergoing a review and that will inform these plans, which I believe are due in June. Anything more you want to add to that, you can.

ANN MONTESANO: Yes, thank you Council Member Chin, and I just want to echo the sort of vision you laid of expanding and increasing the capacity of city agencies to do the language access work. I think one of the core work in priorities at MOIA within our language access team is really helping to increase that capacity within city agencies and so, we do that primarily through the language access coordinators. They're not exclusive convening those coordinators throughout the year to share best practices to disseminate guidance, to understand the challenges and to sort of address those challenges through training and materials, and so, through the pandemic, we've done that also, having trainings to, for example, to provide guidance on how you can make your website more accessible, how you can integrate language access into recovery planning, so that is a key part of the work that we do with agencies on language access.

CM CHIN: Are the agencies responsive to you? I mean, are they cooperating, are they working

well with you or are they giving you a hard time or like they're not being that supportive?

COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: I can start and then Ann, you can certainly jump in. You know, I think the agencies were very responsive during the pandemic. I think that everybody was, you know, going through their own challenges and trying to reboot and reimagine the way that they did their work, and you know, we moved with DOH pretty quickly to increasing both the amount of languages they were translating as well as the speed of translations as well as the method of translations. Within a short period of time, it feels like it wasn't because everyday was so critical and we absolutely agree with that assessment and the need to do better and to have these systems, as you said, a part of the roll out from the gate as opposed to something that gets remedied a couple of weeks later. We worked closed with SPS, one of the agencies that you highlighted to bring, not only the speed back, but also our language services team sort of stepped up and stepped in to provide translations and other services for SPS to speed the process of their translations as well as ensure that any kind of, roll out of programming as

well as education was done in the different languages and so, people were responsive, I would say, and all of the agencies appreciated the support. I think, as much as we have progressed, the reality is this is fairly new for most agencies to do in such a robust way and we are learning and they're learning, right, and it is really important to continue the conversations to ensure that it's prioritized and that the, as we have all articulated, both the skills sets as well as the processes and resources needed to do this work is inherent within the agencies themselves, and there definitely agencies we have heard more about, and so our team is really focused on working directly with agencies that have, where we've heard the greatest challenges, and also to ensure that, as Ann noted, we're providing continued emphasis, guidance and resources to all agencies as they continue these efforts.

CM CHIN: There's one more question, Chair, if I may, regarding the budget. Like does MOIA have a set-aside budget, if not, then we need to advocate for one because there's so many small organizations that deal with immigrant groups, languages that we might not even familiar with and we

1 heard that, you know, through some of our hearings
2 and so, and they are, often time, are the ones that
3 will do the translation, you know, for the population
4 that they serve that the city probably doesn't even
5 recognize, right, and the other is that they should
6 have the resources and support. I mean, they should
7 be paid for doing some of that work into translation.
8 The other is money, you know, budget allocated to
9 promote programs in the ethnic media, right, and it
10 should not be always like free media, right. A lot
11 of time we expect the ethnic media, oh, free press,
12 you know, we give them a press release on the
13 program, and they'll publicize for us, but there
14 should be a budget allocated to support this ethnic
15 media because they often are the one that reaches out
16 broadly to immigrant communities that might not be
17 served, and there's so many different languages that
18 are being spoken and they are a great resource, but
19 they need our support. So, we should not rely on
20 just free media, but have a budget set aside to put
21 in, you know, ads and materials so they can get that
22 information out to the broader immigrant community
23 population that's hard to reach. So, does the Mayor
24 have that budget set aside for that?
25

COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Sure... (Crosstalk).

CM CHIN: For the groups and the media.

COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: So, I want to start by speaking to the media. So, this is an area that I think, you know, that you're well aware that not only our office, but the Mayor has been deeply committed to around community and ethnic media. He signed an executive order, maybe two years ago now, it depends (inaudible) of timelines that require that every city agency spend at least 50% of its new and digital placements in community and ethnic media, so all ads spending in that regard, we've seen really positive results from that. In fact, with strong editorials that speak to that effort having really sustained a lot of community and ethnic media outlets through this period of time, which I think is fantastic and certainly an important impact that that order has. We've also seen a continued commitment to doing that work from agencies themselves, sort of a more deepened understanding and respect for the role that community and ethnic media play, and so, ensuring that in all the work that we've been doing around (inaudible) and that CCHR has been doing around discrimination, that we have been doing around

public charge and the importance to have support not here and engaging city service at this time that we've done through NY Care. All of those efforts have a hyper focus on the utilization of community and ethnic media, not just an earned media, but in our spending. So, you know, I can sort of share positively that that's happening and that's happening at a much higher rate because of both the executive order, but also the efforts that we've undertaken internally to bring emphasis and understanding to the importance of using community and ethnic media. Traditionally, on the earned side, my team, who gets a lot of credit for this, has really worked in the last year at centering the role of community in ethnic media and how we share information out and the importance of going into deeper conversations with community and ethnic media and making city officials available to them to answers questions that are pertinent to their communities that we do regular and continue to do and welcome your ideas and thoughts on the community and ethnic roundtables with the media. We've also worked to support agencies in thinking about how to make folks available to the community and ethnic media, and we've also developed a regular

briefing that we send to community and ethnic media to facility or support information sharing and reporting that they do. So, this is an area of deep commitment and I think a tremendous amount of progress, not just, again, on utilizing them, but in actual add dollars, but something we welcome continued conversation around. In terms of the first part of your question, I think it was just in terms of resources to continue to do this work effectively. You know, we have definitely had a positive relationship working with OMB as we've identified increased need through our work as an office in this area. We have been met positively with response. We are continuing to look at infrastructurally to be more responsive to your question. What are the ways we can improve how we do this work, the ability to support something like the language bank to support community providers in doing this work or otherwise, and that's something we keep looking at, but one of the ways that we have done that is through funding a few different programs, the Know Your Rights Program, the NYC Care Outreach Effort and Initiative, the T2 Outreach Effort and Initiative, a really big part of the way we see that work is that it invites

linguistically competent community providers to do to the work in language, and so those are not small efforts. Those are (inaudible) efforts, and I think exists because of the proof that we've all sort of shown about this works, right, both through our continued work together, but also through the census effort and so, for T2, for instance, there's about 20 something, I think, organizations that are funded with over 20 million dollars of investment in that work. Our Know Your Rights Program is really designed to reach communities that have been underserved and to your point, in less used languages. So, the organizations themselves have the capacity internally to do that work with their communities. Additionally, the NYC Care Outreach sort of, organizations are similarly selected to have that capacity and funded to do that work, and then lastly, I think to hit on the third point you made around working with languages that are lessor used or aren't in our top ten, this is something that we have been working directly with community providers on as things are either brought to our attention or revealed through our work or others to start to improve how we do that translation work and when, and

that informs some of what we recommend to other agencies. So, for the Department of Health, for instance, you know, recommending the increase in languages, we not only base those languages on data that we have and census data, but also on work with the communities and feedback that we had been receiving from communities to expand what those languages are, and we work closely with community providers. I can think of a few off of the top of my head that I've even been engaged with like Fuzzy Car and others for languages like Nepali or other languages to improve the quality of the translations when they're done in those languages and how their done, so we've worked to develop a glossary of terms, for instance, for our vendors, and those are efforts that are, you know, they're really, really critical, but I agree there should be more of and I think part of it is people knowing that they can come to us for those things when they see, and part of it is just system-wise, making sure that we're being thoughtful about how we do the education and information sharing around them with the agencies.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you, Commissioner...
(Crosstalk).

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CM CHIN: Thank you.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you, Council Member Chin, and we've also been joined by Council Member Mathieu Eugene from Brooklyn as well, and I know that we're going to have to transition to our panels, and can you identify who is going to stay here from MOIA to review all the testimony from the public?

COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: I think I have a number of folks on.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Okay, so I will ask them to identify... (crosstalk).

COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Yeah.

CHAIR MENCHACA: And here's my final piece. Clearly, we have dozens of questions that we're going to send you so that we can get a reply from, so that we can help build our Council response. We want to ensure that the Council response, that the people's body is clear about what's happening, and I believe, as a City Council Member and Chair of the Immigration Committee that Local Law 30 of 2017 is not being followed, and so, what do we do with that? What happens when the City Council writes a law, passes it, and the Mayor's Office and the agencies

are not follow it? Like what do we do? What happens, and that's the crux of this whole conversation that we're having here, and we need to hold somebody accountable, and the way that we do that is through budget, to re-allocate, to re-think how we do what we do, and hope that you're open to some of these things, and I hope that our colleagues are open to some of these things so that we can actually address these issues because what we're not asking New Yorkers about is like how to connect to a service like a free tree, a fruit tree that they can take home, we're talking about our legal services, conversations around the vaccines so we can get people excited and signed up. Like this is about life and death, and I know that, I hear the urgency in your voice and in your work, but it is not enough, and what do we do when that happens, and what is the city and the budget going to look like to respond to those things? And so that's the crux of where we are right now, and we're going to be hearing from several panels today about those issues, and we will be following up with you Commissioner afterward.

COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Thank you, and just to note, Yamine and Zana from our team will be

on to start in terms of listening and others will
join as they transition out.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Great, wonderful. Well,
thank you so much and I hope you have a safe and
healthy day.

COMMISSIONER MOSTOFI: Thank you, thank
you everyone.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you, and I will
now hand it back to Committee Council, Harbani Ahuja.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank
you, Chair. We've now concluded Administration
testimony and we will be turning to public testimony.
I'd like to remind everyone that we will calling on
individuals one-by-one to testify and each panelist
will be given two minutes to speak. For panelists,
after I call your name, a member of our staff will
unmute you. There may be a few seconds of delay
before you are unmuted, and we thank you in advance
for your patience. Please wait a brief moment for
the Sergeant at Arms to announce that you may begin
before starting your testimony. Council Members who
have questions for a particular panelist should use
the Zoom raise hand function, and I will call on you
after the panel has completed their testimony in the

order in which you have raised your hands. I'd like to now welcome our first public panel. In order, I will be calling on Veronica Piedra Leon followed by Yesenia Mata, followed by Vanessa Marquez. Veronica Piedra Leon, you may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

VERONICA PIEDRA LEON: Good afternoon Chairperson Menchaca and the distinguished Members of the New York City Council Committee on Immigration. On behalf of the New York City Day Laborer Coalition, I want to thank you for this opportunity to testify today in support of the Day Labor Workforce Development Initiative. The Day Labor Workforce Development Initiative came together to address the needs of Day Labors, men and women looking for employment in open air markets by the side of the road at busy intersections in front of home improvement stores and other public areas. As members of the city's informal workforce, Day Labors experienced (inaudible), pervasive construction accidents, work force has lack of access to work force development training and lack of infrastructure. The initiative schools have focused on addressing these issues by linking Day Laborers to

vital services providing training for work force safety and legal rights, addressing (inaudible), providing access to jobs and most importantly, creating safe and dignified spaces for Day Laborers to congregate as they start forking for work.

Historically, Day Laborers have played a vital role in disaster relief efforts throughout the county in places like New York after Hurricane Sandy and New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Since the offset of the COVID-19 pandemic and throughout this pandemic, Day Laborer centers have served as emergency response hubs providing essential services to New York in high impacted areas. We thank the Mayor's Office for Immigrant Affairs, for their ongoing partnership this pandemic. Without their support and the support of the Council through this initiative, we would have not been able to do the work that we do. The initiative organizations, La Colmena, New York Immigrant Empowerment, (inaudible) Catholic Charities, and the North Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights, also known as the Coalition for Immigrant Freedom, have all been instrumental in the emergency recovery work that has taken place post-pandemic, and continues to be a partner, and we hope

to be considered a partner to have an active role in
the post-recovery... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time has expired.

VERONICA PIEDRA LEON: Economy that we're
trying to do. So, we thank the Council for the
support that you have given us throughout all these
years. We thank Chairperson Menchaca for his
support, and we hope to continue to count with the
support of the Council and the partners across all
the different government agencies that continue to
fund the work that we do. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank
you so much for your testimony. I'd like to now
welcome Yesenia Mata to testify. After Yesenia, we
will be hearing from Manuel Castro. Yesenia, you may
begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

YESENIA MATA: My name is Yesenia Mata.

I am the Executive Director of the Colmena, an
Immigrant and Day Laborer rights organization based
in Staten Island, New York. When the pandemic began
and many shut their doors on Staten Island, la
Colmena decided to keep its doors open because we
knew that immigrant workers were going to be effected

the most. Throughout the pandemic, we took the role that many elected officials on Staten Island failed to take. We took the role of proving that we, as a community, are essential. We provided mutual aid through food distribution, through economic support, through COVID testing, and even vaccine distribution, and still we continued with our services of dispatching Day Laborers to their jobs and conducting AST and OSHA classes. At a moment that we should have fallen, we didn't. If anything, we grew, and because more organized, outreaching to immigrants at every job sector. Today, also you will hear from Sarahi Marquez from Plaza San Jeronimo, an immigrant-owned restaurant who, through the pandemic, struggled because the city was inefficient to know how to outreach to the immigrant-owned businesses, restaurants who had language barriers, technological barriers, and mistrust, or didn't know who to connect with. This is another role that La Colmena took to connect with all immigrant workers. La Colmena is now in the process of opening up another center. Why? Because of the need of the support that immigrant workers have. Why? Because elected officials have failed time after time to provide

support, but not us. We are here, more organized than ever and ready to not only support immigrant businesses and immigrant workers, but the City of New York to recover as we have been doing throughout this time. The question I asked now is what would have happened had La Colmena not been here? The reason we were able to continue providing mutual aid is because we are from Staten Island and we know Staten Island.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Manuel Castro to testify. Following Manuel Castro, we will be hearing from Nadia Molina followed by Sarahi Marquez. Manuel Castro, you may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

MANUEL CASTRO: Thank you and good afternoon to Chairman Carlos Menchaca and Members of the Committee on Immigration. My name is Manuel Castro and I'm the Executive Director of NICE, New York Immigrant Community Empowerment. I am here to also testify in support of the daily workforce initiative that supports Day Laborers Centers across all five boroughs of New York City. I am here to

emphasize how critical these centers have been during the pandemic. It will be for years to come as immigrants re-enter the workforce in large numbers and will continue to sustain this city, but unfortunately will be at an incredibly high risk of workplace abuse and unsafe conditions. So, NICE is located in Queens, the early epicenter of the pandemic, and our members would usually gather at the center to organize jobs and receive other critical services, but when the pandemic hit us, the center truly became a refuge, not just for our members who were using our center, but for the many thousands of workers who have received services from us across the years. We immediately started to reach out to all of our members, organizing one of the largest phone banks we've ever organized. We spoke with over 5000 of our members and quickly learned what eventually experts would find out that our communities would be disproportionately impacted by this pandemic and that entire households were being ravaged by the virus. So, we immediately became a center for all these workers and our communities to receive critical information about the virus, to receive PPE, and to receive food assistance.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

MANUEL CASTRO: We also developed a strategic plan where we raised cash assistance to directly support workers that were losing their jobs and that were losing their homes and to date, we have distributed over 2.5 million dollars in cash assistance; something that none of the governments at any level has been able to do for this population. So, with that, I want to say, you know, hopefully that City Council will continue to recognize and support these centers as vital resources for these communities, and we hope that you consider our budget priorities and recommendations in this next upcoming budget negotiation. I thank you for your support and for your time today, thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Nadia Molina to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

NADIA MOLINA: Thank you to the Committee. I'm Nadia Marin Molina from the National Day Laborer Organizing Network, or NDLON, and I'd like to give a special thank you to Council Member

1 Menchaca for your leadership and for your work as a
2 champion, always making sure that Day Laborers and
3 other workers are recognized for their contributions
4 rather than criminalized and excluded. I'm
5 testifying also in support of the Day Laborer
6 Workforce Initiative which has had astounding success
7 since it began. NDLOM supported the DLWI when it was
8 just an idea that New York City should support Day
9 Laborer centers and it was only three small
10 organizations. Now, they are in every borough and
11 reaching thousands and thousands of workers across
12 the city. In the pandemic, this went to an entirely
13 different level. Day Laborer organizations were
14 partners with the city in distributing millions in
15 cash assistance, reaching huge numbers with
16 desperately needed food and continuing their
17 traditional work and enforcing worker's rights;
18 meanwhile, pushing for equal access to COVID relief
19 from the state and Federal governments, and they
20 really showed an ability to transform, adapt, act
21 quickly and respond to their community's local needs.
22 We're asking that the city continue to see the Day
23 Laborers center as active partners in the recovery,
24 and this will be increasingly important, not less, as
25

we work in the recovery to have jobs with standards and dignity. There's an active campaign to create funds for excluded workers, the State funds, if this passes, workers will be coming to the centers for support in accessing these funds. You may have seen the large actions on Friday, which the members mobilized for. In health and safety, education and access to vaccines will be key. Federal policy makers, which you mentioned, Council Member Menchaca are looking at all kinds of proposed legislation for citizenship as well as for smaller legalizations and administrative actions.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time has expired.

NADIA MOLINA: Regardless, the need for the Day Laborer coalition and their work is going to continue, and we're just asking that New York City continue to support their expansion and their development. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Sarahi Marquez to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

2 SARAHÍ MARQUEZ: Hello everyone. My name
3 is Sarahi Marquez and I'm a DACA recipient and an
4 immigrant restaurant owner. Through the pandemic, I
5 saw many businesses shut down, especially immigrant-
6 owned businesses at a much higher rate, and I do not
7 know where we would be without the help of La
8 Colmena, who constantly kept reaching out to us on a
9 weekly basis providing us PPE and information of
10 resources available to us. They also highlighted,
11 not only the businesses, but all of the immigrant-
12 owned businesses on Staten Island. I wonder what
13 would have happened to my father, an immigrant man
14 with limited English. I am the only one in my family
15 who is tech savvy and can speak English and able to
16 connect with organizations, and I do not know how
17 other businesses, especially the immigrant-owned
18 businesses do it without the support of someone who
19 can help them. It was a really difficult time,
20 especially for my employees, many of whom I had to
21 let go because of the pandemic and because we
22 couldn't pay them. We're currently still very much
23 struggling so much, we're under so much stress that
24 my father just recently went to the hospital because
25 of chest pains. So, it's really been a huge burden

for us, and I just would wish that elected officials wouldn't forget about Staten Island and know that we are in need and we need support, and we would very much like if the city would support organizations like La Colmena... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

SARAH MARQUEZ: Who has helped many immigrant-owned businesses like myself here in Staten Island, and because they know the community and they are part of the community. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you so much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Ligia Guallpa to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

LIGIA GUALLPA: Thank you so much for inviting to me be part of this panel, especially the Chairman, Carlos Menchaca for his unconditional support to the Day Laborer Workforce, Day Laborer initiative, and the worker's centers who have been the frontline organizations and emergency response center for thousands of Day Laborers who live and work in our city. My name is Ligia Guallpa, and I am the Executive Director of Worker's Justice Project,

worker center that turned into an emergency relief center for more than 20,000 Day Laborers, domestic workers and delivery workers who were left out to survive this pandemic without a safety net, without economic relief, and even without essential rights. Through the Workforce Day Laborer Initiative, Worker's Justice Project a built a strong worker-led infrastructure that has been essential to the survival of frontline immigrant workers and to the recovery effort of our city as well. From north to south, we're currently operating three worker centers that has been distributing close to 2 million dollars in cash relief, distributed more than 10,000 boxes of groceries, over \$12,000 of safety masks, even turning one of our centers in a small factory that was producing over 1000 masks during COVID time, has been training over 1000 workers in 40-hour construction safety, and creating 1000 jobs for essential and excluded workers. We're operating our centers at its maximum capacity, partnering with city government agencies, mutual aid groups, community members to respond to the growing needs of our communities. The truth is that Day Laborer centers, like Worker's

Justice Project have become more essential than ever to our city's recovery... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

LIGIA GUALLEPA: We are grateful for the support, and we hope that you will continue to conditionally support the Day Laborer Workforce Initiative and put this initiative as part of your top budget priorities during this budget negotiation process and continue to play a crucial and essential role to our city's recovery during this difficult time and the worse crisis of our time in New York City.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Alba Villa to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

ALBA LUCERO VILLA: Good afternoon everyone. I thank you for the opportunity to be here, and I will say that I am submitting written testimony. I almost couldn't be here today because my son woke up sick, and I was reminded actually of the last time I testified before you where one of our workers had just lost a family member that morning, and still came to our office to testify. He actually

inspired me to, while I wait for the doctor to go back, to just jump on and let you know how important it is to have your support during this time. I am the Executive Director of the Coalition for Immigrant Freedom, also known as Northern Manhattan Coalition for Immigrant Rights which has been around since 1982, serving the community. We chose to change our name and are in the process of doing so because we really believe we need to be talking about, not just providing the needs our community constantly demands rightfully, but also helping them find freedom in their daily lives, and it's difficult to find freedom when you are under constant struggle and constraints, and despite my privilege and my ability to lead an organization and be able to take care of my child who is sick, which many of our community members cannot. I also am feeling the blunt as the leader of an organization who has been opened since the pandemic. Almost half of our staff has had to deal with COVID who has seen the impact of budget cuts and is concerned now, I have to think about rather we paid our insurance premium or not to make sure I can see my son's doctor because it has been that difficult during the pandemic for us as an immigrant-led

community-based organization, we have been surviving by the thin of our skin, while we meet the community's needs, and so I urge you today to help us continue do that and move beyond the ability to help people to survive their needs and really transform our communities ability to thrive, and that's why I'm here for a few minutes to let you know that all of the initiatives that you have helped support has really allowed us to transform the work we do... (crosstalk).

SGT SADOWSKY: Time expired.

ALBA LUCERO VILLA: Not only through the worker's center that transforms worker development training to dispatching and worker education, that's not only relevant culturally and uplifting, but it's also helping our city and our society as a whole. We are in dire need to continue the immigration legal services that we provide, the worker's service that we provide, the adult literacy services that we provide. Our funding keeps getting cut and we are being asked to do more with less, and I think it's reflective of all of the system failures that this pandemic has exposed in our country with the disparities that existed, communities of color,

including community-based organizations. So, I ask you today to help me and my staff, help our community to meet the challenges of this pandemic by continuing to support us and ensuring that the funding we received is given without delay so that we can do our work in the best way possible. Thank you for your time.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'm now going to turn it to Chair Menchaca for questions.

CHAIR MENCHACA: I want to say thank you Alba, Ligia, Veronica, Nadia, Manny, Sarahi, Yesenia, thank you all for testifying. There's a reason why we started with the Day Laborers organizations and the incredible coalition that you really have brought into existence. The work that you were doing happened before the City Council got involved, but it was when government got involved with Day Laborer initiatives that it continued to grow over the years and support from the City Council Members that you also began to grow, and the way that this happened was for the City of New York to use tax levy dollars to support this organizing because we knew that this was the role that you would all play, and now, at a

time when the budget is decreasing, we have to make a choice. You are all doing incredible work. I also want to highlight the fact that many of you are led by women, and today is International Women's Day. This is the power of our communities, especially immigrant women, mothers, who are fighting on the ground and supporting everyone with everything that they have, and many times, with nothing, and yet, you make that happen, and all we're asking is the City of New York support organizing and allow you all to make the decisions on the ground to ensure that everyone gets what they need, and I think that's the question today, and so I just want to say thank you for this work, and maybe, the one question that I have for you is, as we begin to reopen slowly, and that's going to be a testament to our ability to get the vaccine out, we've already talked about language access playing a big role in how communities, especially immigrant communities get access to the vaccine, all of that. What do you need the most right now to ensure that you can continue to do that work, grow it in coalition in the City of New York right now, and I'll two or three of you to kind of talk through and bring new ideas as one person speaks.

ALBA LUCERO VILLA: Thank you, Council Member Menchaca, you brought tears to my eyes. I think what we need is access and funding, and I'll give you an example. Access, we have partnered with New York Presbyterian that allows us to directly register community members to get their vaccines. I can guarantee you that the dozens of community members we've registered would not have gotten their vaccine without that ability for us to say, "Give them the education and the confidence they need to say yes to a vaccine and then say okay, you're scheduled for next Wednesday. What do you need to get there?" So, that's a very specific example of how it works. Another example is when we were awarded MOIA's cash assistance funds, it was given up front and without delay. We were able to meet that demand, we were able to help more than 1000 families, distribute \$850,000. We were able to do it because we got the funding support to do that. We have tried to do other referral-type work, but without funding, I cannot ask my staff to do more than they're already doing with reduced hours, furloughed schedules, and we still we need access to directly register our community because they are going to come to us as

trusted partner, and we need funding to be able to continue doing it, so I don't have to worry about if I'm going to meet payroll next week or not.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you, Alba, and I know there's some others that raised their hand to respond.

LIGIA GUALLPA: I can go next. First of all, I just want a second with Alba about the funding, making sure Day Laborer Workforce Initiative, it's part of your top priority, one of your, you know, biggest priorities for this coming year, and the second one that I wanted to mention a little bit is about the institutionalizing a lot of the services that is being provided to our communities, just quickly about it, making it less institutionalized the COVID vaccinations, the SSTs is becoming just a whole disaster while how the whole process, like, it's being done, so really thinking through about how we don't continuously institutionalize services, that we need to make sure it gets to our communities quicker, faster, and we're here as community groups to do that. So, rely on us cause we're here and we're ready to get whatever

essential services is needed into the hands of our communities.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Right. Thank you, Ligia.

VERONICA PIEDRA LEON: I can go next. I think just to echo what Alba and Ligia have said, it's about figuring out and thinking innovatively about how each of the other initiatives can be looked in and how we can, with language access, make sure that we break down barriers of language because we not only have 22 languages, we have dialects that are not even taken into consideration. There are no translation services for them. So, it's really thinking about how do we get to those who were in high-impacted areas with no resources whatsoever, how do we utilize the centers are so crucial in these high-impacted areas, and we give through the funding the resources and the connection with other government agencies, and looping the centers into other initiatives, to think about a model of rapid response. This is about making sure that we build trust with the communities that we serve, emphasize the need for this vaccine, but also think creatively about how we use this model to expand and extend the

services that the city provides to New Yorkers across different areas.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Yeah. Thank you, thank you for that.

MANUEL CASTRO: I would like to add, and hi everyone, it's Manny again, you know right now, thousands of immigrants are looking for work. You know, after many months of not being able to work, having ran out of savings, having depleted all their economic, you know, resources, and that's exactly the population we serve. Day Laborer centers for many years, have focused on finding working and helping immigrants find good, well-paid, dignified work. Now, you know, this population has just grown, and because of the pandemic, I mean, all of our centers are doing three or four times as much as we were doing, and so I just want to emphasize that role, and this is among the only, well, I think this is the only initiative organizations are actually helping immigrants find work and be placed in work and provide that additional training and perhaps the only initiative in the country that is doing that. So, it's something really important to lift up and continue to support because the coming five years are

going to be critical for this economic recovery, and so, but before we get to that, we need to make sure that all of our members, all of these workers are vaccinated and everyone, and a lot of the folks on this call actually, from the Mayor's office and so on understand that we're working day and night and day out on getting access to this vaccine to our members. Just over the weekend, I was in touch with many of you over issues that we have been finding in the distribution of vaccines. Everything from like social security number requests on forms to language access issues, this is just unacceptable. We need to get this vaccine to these workers because these are going to be amongst the first workers that are going to go out to work, and so we need to protect them and we need to make sure this economic recovery is just, and so, there's a lot that we can do in partners with the city, and you know, these groups are in some ways, you know, we were meant for this kind of crisis as, you know, some of my colleagues have testified. We've been doing this after hurricanes, after natural disasters and so, here we are, ready to continue to partner with the city. Thank you so much.

YESENIA MATA: Hi everyone, Yesenia. I want to reiterate exactly what everyone on this panel just said. Throughout the pandemic, it has been centers like ours that have been assisting, and it was a very interesting point what Councilwoman Chin mentioned that we have been the personnel that has assisted our community with language access. That is something that our organizations don't get funding for; however, we have been assisting our community, being that liaison, and we have been doing this through COVID testing, through the COVID vaccine distribution. La Colmena was one of the first organizations here in Staten Island to start getting members, giving access to the vaccine, including, like this weekend, we took domestic workers, Day Laborer, hair dressers, restaurant owners to go and get the COVID vaccine and we started seeing that barrier too. It was easier for us to get that because we have that access. It was easier for La Colmena to get that because we were able to communicate with our members and the personnel who was giving the COVID vaccine; however, if we're not here, then who will then be reaching to the immigrant workers for them to get vaccinated, and this is just

not La Colmena doing it now, but it's each center, and has really taken a toll on each one of us. We have definitely done the work that many elected officials have failed to do, and what we are not doing is asking you all to do not cut our funding because if we're not here, then who going to be there to support the immigrant workers. We are equipped, we know how to do this type of work, we have this type of training and we are ready to assist the city to recover, and as when many have seen, when there's snow, whose the first few people out there? It's our Day Laborers doing the snow removal. That is what we show each time, that our Day Laborers, that our centers are ready, and they're equipped to assist the city in any sort of disaster and economic relief that they may need as well because we know how to reach out to our community.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you, Yesenia, and I'm going to hand it over to Council Member Chin, and just again, thank you to the reminder, the connection, and the powerful force of the Day Laborer centers. Thank you.

CM CHIN: Thank you, Chair. I wanted to really thank the first panel and I also want to, you

know, celebrate International Woman's Day and it's really great to see so many women leaders at the hearing today. I am just so; I could say proud. I remember when we first started, the Day Laborer centers was one of the initiatives that the City Council pushed for and seeing it grow to city wide and the great work that all of you have done. I think going forward, we have to see how we can institutionalize (inaudible) it should be part of the city's funding. I mean, the city has workforce development centers. Well, you guys are the workforce development center too, and you should be adequately funded, and what I'm talking about is baseline funding. If you're part of the city's infrastructure, which you should be, because Council funding is every year, and it's just so difficult, but we need to stabilize it, and that's something I think, Chair, we need to really work towards, that this should be part of the city's agency and workforce development, and we should look forward to seeing how we can help you, so that you can get baseline funding to continue to do the great work that you do. Thank you.

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CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you, Council Member Chin, and that is the plan, and I think you and I can really grow the revolution in the City Council to ensure that that happens. So, thank you to this panel. I'll hand it over to Committee Council, Harbani Ahuja.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you, Chair. I'm just going to quickly ask if there are any other Council Member questions for this panel? Seeing no hands, I'm going to thank this panel for their testimony, and we'll be moving on to our next panel. In order, I will be calling on Ira Yankwitt, followed Manal Joud, following Eun Ha Grace Lee, following Christine Heo, followed by Christine Li, followed by Iris Shry-Chen, followed by Myong Hee Sung, followed by Mi Ok Oh. Ira Yankwitt, you may begin your testimony when you are ready.

SGT. HOPE: Time starts now.

IRA YANKWITT: Thank you, Chair Menchaca for the opportunity to testify. My name is Ira Yankwitt and I'm the Executive Director of the Literacy Assistance Center. The LAC is a proud member of the New York City coalition for adult literacy, and I'd like to take a moment on behalf of

all the students, teachers and programs, to thank you for being the single greatest Legislative champion for adult literacy in New York and perhaps anywhere in the country over these past eight years. As you are well-aware, there are more than 2.2 million adults in New York City without English language proficiency or a high school diploma. Many of these New Yorkers have been on the frontline of the pandemic performing essential work that has been sustaining our communities often with little or no safety net. While adult literacy education is only part of the solution, it will be essential to a fair, a just, and a sustainable recovery. Adult literacy education is an immigrant right's issue, a feminist issue, a racial justice issue, and an issue of educational justice. Higher levels of literacy are associated with greater health knowledge, use of healthcare services, and the ability to manage chronic health conditions and communicate with healthcare providers. Moreover, according to the National Institutes for Health, a mother's reading skill is the greatest determinate of her children's future academic success, outweighing other factors such as neighborhood and family income. Greater

literacy skills are also directly linked to higher income. Yet, city and state funding for adult literacy education is so limited that fewer than 4% of the 2.2 million adults are able to access classes in any given year. So, what do we need to do?

First, the city must restore and baseline the 12 million dollars in annual funds that the Council secured in the budget every year from FY17 to FY20, and which was reduced to 9.8 million in FY21.

Second, we must ensure that every adult literacy student who needs it, is provided with the necessary hardware and with free internet service to be able to access and engage in online educational platforms. No adult, no parent who would otherwise be able to participate in a basic education, ESOL, or high school equivalency class should be denied the opportunity simple due to the lack of basic infrastructure... (crosstalk).

SGT. HOPE: Time expired.

IRA YANKWITT: Third, we call on the city to invest 10.5 million dollars in the adult literacy pilot project that NYCCAL had proposed prior to the pandemic. The project would quadruple city funding for approximately 25 community-based adult literacy

programs to support greater investment in student support services, digital literacy development, professional development, and contextualized curriculum and instruction, all of which approved this past year, and finally, we need to increase the total funding for adult literacy education in New York City by six-fold over the next five years. Currently the total state and city funding for adult literacy education amounts to approximately 85 million dollar a year in New York City. Less than \$40 a year for each of the 2.2 million adults in need and just over \$1000 for every student who is able to access classes. We need to work together to increase this funding to 500 million dollar per year, both to serve far more than the 3% to 4% of the 2.2 million adults that we are currently serving and to provide those students, their teachers, and their programs with the full range of resources and supports and benefits that they need and deserve. Thank you so much for your time and attention.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Manal Joud to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

STG. HOPE: Time starts now.

MANAL JOUD: Hello, thank you. It's nice to meet you. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify and finally, Happy Woman's Day. My name is Manal Joud. I am an ESL student at City College. I came to the USA with my family two years ago. I didn't know anything about new language, anything, some simple grammar. Our goal for us like family here, are to get better education for me and for my children, and to get job because I don't want to be dependent on the government. So, what was the solution? It was to learn English to help the muslims in communicating with the people and help my children in their studies, and therefore, to take me as an example to be better and to serve this community. Now, I'm doing it City College for adult education. So, I'll be happy with my family if you support and provide funding for adult education at my college. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Eun Ha Grace Lee to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. HOPE: Time starts now.

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COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Okay, I think we might be having some technical issues, so we'll circle back. I'd like to now welcome Christine Heo to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. HOPE: Time starts now.

CHRISTINE HEO: Okay. Good afternoon Chair Menchaca and Members of the Committee on Immigration. My name is Christine Heo. I am currently taking English classes at Korean Community Services of Metropolitan New York Incorporated, KCS. KCS is a community social service nonprofit organization located in Bayside, New York. I am happy that you have given me the opportunity to testify in front of you about the importance of (inaudible). A couple of years ago, I went to see a play in Central Park. Someone had brought me to see it right in the park even though I could not fully understand the play since it was in English. I was able to enjoy the atmosphere, the audience, and the stage actors. Watching this play motivated me to start to study English. I realized that I wanted to start English to not only also better understand the culture, but to also be able to communicate with my neighborhoods and have good relationships with my

1 grandchildren. Starting English at KCS has allowed
2 me to accomplish my goals. Last year was a difficult
3 year for everyone, but even though through all the
4 hardships and the startle, I was glad KCS offered
5 English classes online. It helped me in a lot of
6 ways and seeing my classmate's faces as well as my
7 instructor's face really brightened my day and week.
8 In closely, I'm thankful that the City Council has
9 supported students like me for a long time, and I
10 hope that the Council will continue to provide
11 funding for KCS this coming fiscal year. Thank you
12 again for giving the opportunity to testify today.
13 Thank you.

14
15 COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank
16 you for your testimony. I'd like to now go back to
17 Eun Ha Grace Lee to testify. You may begin when you
18 are ready.

19 SGT. HOPE: Time starts now.

20 EUN HA GRACE LEE: Good afternoon, Chair
21 Menchaca and Members of the Committee on Immigration.
22 My name is Eun Ha Lee and I'm currently taking
23 English class at Korean Community Service of
24 Metropolitan New York. I'm grateful that you have
25 given me the opportunity to testify about important

adult literacy. Prior to taking English class at KCS, I could only express my thought and feelings in simple sentences. Whenever anyone would ask me more difficult questions, I would ultimately become nervous and lose confidence. In order to overcome my fear and have a deeper conversation with other people, I decided to enroll in English classes. Taking English class at KCS has allowed me to improve my abilities in grammar, writing, speaking, and reading. Not only has it given me the confidence to speak with other people, but it has also helped me realize that my dream could become a reality because I taught the kids in Korea for 10 years before coming here. I have always wanted to start a daycare center. At first, I thought that my dream was impossible, but learning English has given me the confidence to start a daycare center one day. The daycare center that I would run would not only be for Korean kids, but for all ethnic groups, but in order for me to accomplish my goal, I would need to continue improving my English skills so that I am able to talk with the parents that bring in their children and to my future staff members as well.

Thank you, thank you again for giving me the
opportunity to testify today.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank
you so much for your testimony. I'd like to now
welcome Christine Lee to testify. You may begin when
you are ready.

SGT. HOPE: Time starts now.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Ms.
Lee, I'm sorry, I think you're muted. You have to
accept the unmute request.

CHRISTINE LEE: Thank you Chair Menchaca
and Members of the Committee on Immigration. My name
is Christine Lee, and I am also currently taking
English classes at Korean Community Service of
Metropolitan New York. Christine Heo is one of my
classmates. I am grateful that you have given me the
opportunity to testify in front of you about the
important of adult literacy. I used to hesitate
talking on the phone with my daughter-in-law and
grandchildren who only speak English. By taking
English classes at KCS has given me the confidence
and the ability to communicate with them. I am happy
that I have been able to continue my classes online
even throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been

a huge help since I (inaudible) being able to see my classmates and my teacher twice a week has given me great joy and has allowed me to appreciate the small things in life. I am extremely grateful to be studying English (inaudible) it not only helps me communicate with my family, but it has also greatly helped my (inaudible). In closing, I'm grateful that the City Council has supported a person like me for a long time. Thank you again for the giving me the opportunity to testify today. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Iris Shry-Chen to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. HOPE: Time starts now.

IRIS SHRY-CHEN: Hi, good afternoon, Chair Menchaca and the Members of the Committee on Immigration. My name is Irish Shry, and I'm currently taking English class at Korean Community Service of Metropolitan New York, KCS. KCS is a social service, nonprofit organization located in Bayside, New York. I'm grateful that you have give me the opportunity to testify in front of you about importance of adult literacy. English has always

1 been a challenge for me, but I have been grateful
2 that I have the opportunity to improve my English by
3 taking online classes at KCS, especially during the
4 pandemic. Since we are stay home and are not out
5 anymore, being able to continue my class online has
6 helped me in so many ways. Every morning, when I
7 wake up, I look forward to my class, things that I am
8 able to see my instructor and my wonderful
9 classmates. As a result, it has been a huge help to
10 my mental health. One day, I hope to be able to
11 communicate with other people without having any
12 language barriers. I also hope that I would be able
13 to give back to the community to help with others to
14 improve their skills, English. In closing, I'm
15 grateful that City Council has supported the students
16 like me for a long time. I hope that the Council
17 will continue to provide funding to adult literacy
18 this coming up fiscal year. Thank you again for
19 giving me the opportunity to testify today. Thank
20 you, everyone.

22 COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank
23 you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
24 Myong Hee Sung to testify. You may begin when you
25 are ready.

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SGT. HOPE: Time starts now.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Ms.

Sung, you're audio is very low. We cannot hear you.

I'm sorry. We are unable to hear you. Let me circle back to you. I'm going to move on to our next panelist. Mi Ok Oh, you may begin when you are ready.

SGT. HOPE: Time starts now.

MI OK OH: Yes, good afternoon, Chair
Menchaca and Members of the Committee on Immigration.
My name is Mi Ok Oh. I am grateful to testify in front of you about the importance about adult literacy. My opinion, I believe that in order for an immigrant to get adopted to life in America, he or she needs to learn how to speak English. So, when I found out that KCS was offering English classes for free, I was excited that I would be able to learn the language. Not only have I been to get adjusted to my life in America, I have also been able to learn about American history, politics, and the culture throughout my classes. The topics have not only helped me understand the country that I am living in, but it has also given the opportunity to connect with those around me. More immigrants like me need to

learn about these programs, and the only way that they will be able to participate in this place, if there is continuous funding. In closing, I am grateful that the City Council has supported student like me for a long time, and I hope that the Council will continue to provide the funding for adult literacy this coming fiscal year. Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to testify today. Thank you everyone.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'm going to circle back to Myong He Sung. I'm so sorry, Ms. Sung, I'm think your audio isn't working or your microphone is working. We're not able to hear you. I just want to remind everyone that you may submit written testimony at testimony@Council.NYC.gov and we can try to circle back to you at a later time, if you're able to resolve your audio issue. I'd like to now turn it over to Chair Menchaca for questions.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you, Harbani, and I want to say thank you to this panel that really, I think that in every way shows the power of voice and each of you who have testify today have really responded with the kind of action that our

government, our local government should be taking to support your education, and adult literacy to many of the points that Ira Yankwitt made, on behalf of the coalition, the larger adult literacy coalition has been making for years now is that there is powerful transformation for individuals, for families, for communities, for engagement, for jobs, for everything that the city is asking for, and so, what we want to do is make the connection between language access for those who need immediate assistance to connect to service and then to support all of you in your endeavors for education, including my mother, for example, that just because of her inability to have a class at the time that she needed to when I was growing up, didn't have access to classes, and so never got her high school equivalency, and never gained command of the English language, and so, so, I hear you, and I'm going to continue to fight for you and I think that you have partnered, not just in me, but in this larger City Council including Council Member Chin, who I want to hand it over to now for her comment and questions. Thank you.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

CM CHIN: Ok, thank you. Thank you,
Chair. I really wanted to thank this panel. The
testimony was great. It just illustrates the
importance of learning English and how important it
is for you to be able to communicate with your
grandchild, you know, with the teachers, it makes so
much sense, and we've been fight on this for so many
years, that all immigrants, we want to learn English.
Just give us he opportunity, and it just frustrates
us, right, Chair Menchaca, that every year, we have
to convince the administration that they need to
support this, and Ira, we agree with you. The
funding needs to be there, and it just makes so much
sense. So, I wish the Mayor would have heard your
testimony to convince him why this is so important.
So, I urge you to also write to him, call him, let
him know that adult literacy is great, and it's so
useful to you and to your community, and to your
family, and I just wanted to thank you, and you know,
for sharing your stories with us, and you will make
your contribution, and some of you are seniors and
you will be volunteering, you will be helping, you
will be contributing to this city because you were
able to learn English. So, I think this is something

that we need to continue to advocate the resources
for. Thank you.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you Council Member
Chin, and also start businesses, and so I do hope you
start your daycare business, and we will be there to
support, so thank you. I'll hand it back to Council
of the Committee, Harbani Ahuja.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank
you, Chair. I'm just going to quickly ask if there
are any other Council Member questions for this
panel? Seeing no hands, I'm going to thank this
panel for their testimony, and we will be moving on
to our next panel. In order, I will be calling on
Ravi Reddi, following Erick Agarijo, followed by Maya
Grung, follow Lakshmi Sanmuganathan, followed by
Shaaranya Pillai, followed by Carlyn Cowen. Ravi
Reddi, you may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

RAVI REDDI: Thank you so much, and I
want to thank you for offering us the opportunity to
speak here today. I'm Ravi Reddi, and I'm the
Associate Director of Advocacy and Policy at the
Asian-American Federation. This year's budget must
make a priority of supporting our immigrant

communities and CBOs that have led by example in providing language accessible and culturally competent services for 1.3 million strong Asian-American community, two out of three of whom are foreign-born and one in five of whom are undocumented. Firstly, the Asian-American community has borne the brunt of the previous Administration's immigrant assault and are scrambling to find culturally competent language accessible, affordable immigrant legal advocacy. City Council should do its part and set aside 2 million dollars for immigrant legal services funding, for not only CBOs with a track record of providing immigration legal services, but also the agencies who have provided language and navigation support in order to make these services accessible, and as our immigration community also bears the disproportionate burden of the basic need and security brought on by the pandemic, the city must also increase investment in safety net programs such as community health centers and clinics, food pantries as well as an emergency network of linguistically and competent food service programs. Our seniors and other vulnerable population need to be connected to these alternative good benefits in

order to begin to address the harm inflicted by the continued after-effects of the previous Administration's public charge assault. I want to thank Council Member Menchaca for valuing the continued anemic funding our community has received because of substantial work our (inaudible) are doing to keep our community afloat. Asian New Yorkers comprise at least 10% of the population in more than half our city's districts with the other half having some of the fastest growing Asian populations. As City Council works on this year's budget, Council Members must keep in mind the persistent inequities in city contracting practices in systemic areas facing our CBOs. Contracting processes must give greater way to organizations with a demonstrated track record of serving low income underserved immigrant communities with linguistic and cultural competency, and finally language access. Our immigrants are... (Crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time has expired.

RAVI REDDI: Are facing continued immigration policy (inaudible) while navigating a pandemic that has disproportionately impacted their daily lives. That's why more than at any other time

there is a clear window of opportunity and urgency for City Council to finally fund a community legal interpreter bank as has been discussed as well as find worker call-up that will focus on recruitment, training, and dispatching a qualified interpreter and increasing job opportunities for multi-lingual immigrants. That's \$250,000 per worker co-ops for three co-ops covering Asian, African, and Latin American languages. The payoff from funding these initiatives will be seen in multiple ways, from providing employment opportunities in our immigrant communities to alleviating strains on existing CBO capacity to provide interpretation, to addressing serious gap in quality language interpretation for the communities that need it the most, not just for immigration purposes, but for accessing government assistance during our continued pandemic. The city must also make the FY22 budget include funding such that Local Law 30 is fully and consistently implemented across city agencies as has already been mentioned by Council Members. We under the city is in dire financial restraints, but our immigrants have anchored our city and they deserve well-funded CBOs and robust response to city agencies. We at the

Asian-American Federation thank you for allowing us to testify and look forward to working with all of you to make sure our immigrant community gets the support it deserves. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Erick Agarijo to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

ERICK AGARIJO: Good afternoon and Aloha. I'm originally from Honolulu, Hawaii. I just wanted to start off by mentioning that. My name is Erick Agarijo. I am the Community Outreach and Communications Coordinator of the Korean American Family Service Center. Thank you, Council Member Menchaca and Members of the Council on Immigration staffers for giving me this opportunity to speak before you. I'd also like to recognize the longtime support of your consistent validation of the work KFC does in the community through the much-needed DOVE initiative and other programs that are offered. This initiative was and continues to be critical to supporting our immigrant survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse. As you

folks probably already know, KFC is a nonprofit organization that provides social services to Korean and Asian immigrant survivors and their children who are affected by domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse for the past 32 years. All of our programs and services are offered in a culturally and linguistically appropriate setting. 98% of our clients are immigrants and 100% of our staff members are immigrants themselves or children of immigrant parents. Over 95% of our client's first language is not English and come from low-income backgrounds. Unfortunately, during New York State on pause and throughout the COVID-19, public health and economic crises, KFC responded to a 300% increase in calls to our 24-hour bi-lingual hotline. 88% of these were related to domestic violence, sexual assault, and child abuse. In 2020, we responded to over 4000 hotline calls and KFC served 1201 survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault and provided over 20,908 services related to domestic violence and sexual assault. We want to keep in mind that many of our survivors are undocumented and are excluded from accessing unemployment insurance and all other income

supports. They lost financial means, some temporarily, others permanently.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

ERICK AGARIJO: In loss of livelihood and unable to support themselves and their children.

These consequences have exacerbated as they are ineligible for unemployment benefits and other labor protections by law from which they are excluded.

Many in our community and their loved ones have contracted the virus and died. Without financial means, our immigrant survivors cannot afford food, rent, basic necessities, personal protective equipment and supplies, medical care or basic living expenses, phone, internet, utility bills, etc., and we want to say that KFSC is at the frontlines serving the community and the constituents to fill the gap during this unprecedented trauma. The pathway to this recovery is long and hard and respectfully ask for the restoration or expansion of the budget for the fiscal year 2022. Initiatives like DOVE program, immigrant domestic violence initiative to combat Sexual Assault as well as both adult literacy and digital literacy initiatives and other support will be critical for the sustainability of the

organization as we provide a culturally and
linguistical services and programs, and I want to say
thank you very much for allowing me to testify as
well look forward to working with all of you, and on
a side note, this is my first week in New York City
and I've been working remotely in Honolulu, Hawaii,
so I just want to, hopefully I can bring that weather
from Honolulu, Hawaii. So, thank you very much.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you, Erick.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank
you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Maya
Gurung to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

MAYA GURUNG: Dear Members of the
Immigration Committee, thank you for the opportunity
to testify today. My name is Maya Gurung, and I'm
the Senior Case Coordinator at Adhikaar. Adhikaar is
the only woman led worker and community center
serving and organizing the Nepali speaking community.
We are located in Woodside, Queens and serve more
than 10,000 Nepali speaking people a year. Our
members are low-wage workers working in informal
industries, mostly live in Jackson Heights, Woodside,
Elmhurst, Sunnyside, Ridgewood, Jamaica, and

Flatbush. We are one of the newer and most rapidly growing immigrant communities in New York City. We were once considered the epicenter of the COVID-19 crisis when the pandemic first hit New York. This has had a serious impact in our community for the year and will change our community for the long-term. We have served over 5000 individuals with direct service needs, addressing issues like unemployment, benefit support, healthcare, language access to government resources and emergency fund, medical and food supplies. At this moment, we are experiencing record high inquiries for the immigration and worker's rights related issues, especially on temporary protective status, unemployment and benefits, vaccines, healthcare and etc., and we will have to do this with or without funding. Our members with young children are running out of food at home and fearful to return to work. Those that are finding themselves forced to work or return to work are experiencing detrimental health and safety scrutiny. We are being flooded with needs and requests and if we are to maintain sustainable and collectively work for this community, (inaudible). We are our community's 9-1-1 and 3-1-1 line. We

expect the need for legal services to rise in the coming year, especially if more immigrant legislation is passed. Without an in-house attorney, we will not be able to meet the demand for immigration related services. Currently, we rely on other legal service providers... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time has expired.

MAYA GURUNG: For any type of immigration related support. Under this political climate, there are at maximum capacity as well and are not able to provide us the urgent response that the case commands, especially given the virtual transition of our work. Additionally, even we refer out the cases, member often want us to interpret for them as many interpreters for government services, (inaudible) members are expressing. They also need emotional and supplemental support which requires staff time and (inaudible). In FY2021, Asian led and serving organizations received only 4.65% of city discretionary dollar, and less than 1.5% of social service contract dollars. There has been little support for immigrant workers that are holding the city's economy on their backs and we need to ensure that city will show that immigrant communities are a

priority by allocating the resources needed this coming year. We are here today to ask the Committee to request \$50,000 from the Immigration Opportunities Initiative to provide to critical English services to the Napali-speaking community in New York City.

Thank you for your time and your consideration for funding. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Lakshmi Sanmuganathan to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

LAKSHMI SANMUGANATHAN: Good afternoon City Council. I want to thank Chair Menchaca and our distinguished members of the Committee on Immigration for your continued partnership and solidarity with our 50% and growing campaign. My name is Lakshmi Sanmuganathan. I am the Policy Fellow from the Coalition for Asian-American Children and Families which is the nation's only pan-Asian children and family advocacy organization. CCF leads the fight for our 50% and growing campaign which is the coalition that brings together over 45 Asian led and serving organizations across all five boroughs in the

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New York City to fight for a fair, inclusive and equitable New York City budget. Our communities are heavily immigrant in nature with 78% of our APA population in New York City being immigrants, and the APA population is also the fastest growing group in New York city nearly doubly every decade since 1970, and now making up more than 15% of New York City's population. Unfortunately, though, current levels of public funding remain disproportionate to our community's expansive and growing population and needs. For example, last year, Asian led and serving organizations only received 4.6% of discretionary dollars from City Council. COVID-19 over the past year has left a devastating impact on our APA communities by exacerbating challenges that already existed within the APA community in New York prior to the pandemic. For example, Asian-Americans have experienced the largest increase in joblessness of all major racial groups in New York City with an unemployment rate of almost 26% in May 2020. Nearly 50% of APAs in New York City are living in the hardest hit areas during the pandemic. Asian-Americans are two times more likely to test positive for COVID-19 than their white counterparts, yet, less

likely to get tested at all, and over the past year, anti-Asian related hate crimes in New York City have increased by almost 2000% across all five boroughs. These rising challenges vary across our Asian-Pacific American communities, but the one thing they have in common is that they've all relied heavily... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time has expired.

LAKSHMI SANMUGANATHAN: On community-based organizations to fill in gaps of services to our vulnerable community members through linguistically and culturally competent services. So, I'm here today on behalf of our coalition to ask that City Council provide expanded funding to our community-based organizations so that they can continue address the vital needs in our communities that are continuing to grow and expand amid the pandemic. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you so much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Shaaranya Pillai to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

SHAARANYA PILLAI: Hi, thank you. Thank you, Chair Menchaca and Chair Chin and the Committee on Immigration for helping India Home and our communities provide better services. I am Shaaranya Pillai, Deputy Director at India Home. India Home addresses the South Asian older adult immigrant community through culturally competent services. Our immigrant communities have faced exacerbated challenges as you know, during this pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, New York City South Asian Senior community faced a number of interconnected compounding issues including the prevalence of poverty, overcrowded housing, low English proficiency, low digital literacy, and a lack of access to benefits. India Home has been the support for this community that has been lacking in the existing infrastructure by addressing these issues through our culturally competent services. This dedication continued during the pandemic through our culturally competent meals delivered to the safety of senior's homes, virtual programming that kept seniors informed, engaged and healthy and wellness check calls that provided reassurance and connected seniors to crucial resources and programing during incredible

isolating times. I remember when one of our members, Denaysha Gugoca (SP?) called up our programing team and said, "You are saving lives with your programs". These programs are just not recreation but are wellness and health and safety and a lifeline to communities who are not adequately served in the city's existing infrastructure. Our programs have been far-reaching during this pandemic with over 15,000 meals delivered to over 500 seniors, 1200 grocery packages delivered, 300 plus virtual sessions being given including health education, yoga, exercise, ESL classes, and art classes, and 25,000 plus wellness checks of calls being given to our South Asian older adult community. Furthermore, we've provided robust COVID-19 awareness and outreach to which we have distributed over 20,000 masks to the hardest hit New York City communities, and now have made even more than 220 appointments for our seniors. The older adult community was the hardest hit during this pandemic, and this was especially the case for older adults of color... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time has expired.

SHAARANYA PILLAI: We saw this in our APA communities firsthand. We saw the losses in our

communities, we saw the destruction and distress that shook our older adults in an unfair way, and we gave our 1000% to make sure we can support them however we can. As our days of operation increase by more than 35% and our staff has gone above and beyond to provide services and answer calls from our clients at all times of the day. The Mayor's FY22 preliminary budget, this is crucial moment for us to stabilize our community. Given budget cuts and extreme contract delays this past year, it has been an incredible testing time for nonprofits that have been a lifeline for APA communities. We powered through from the most vulnerable and it's time that we're recognized through a fair and equitable budget. We ask for the enhancement of key citywide initiatives such as digital inclusion, literacy, mental health services for vulnerable populations and emergency food, food pantries, all which we provide, but have not been funded for in this last budget, and we emphasize the importance of restoration to support our seniors initiative, CCNSF, senior centers of immigration, geriatric mental health initiative and cultural immigrant initiative among many others that will help us stabilize the community. We ask for

equity and resource allocation and we thank you so much for your leadership in pushing the city budget and other various stakeholders for listening to our needs and concerns. We request your continued and increased support to help us stabilize our communities. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Carlyn Cowen to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

CARLYN COWEN: Good afternoon. Thank you so much, Council Member Menchaca, Council Member Chin, and the Members of the Immigration Committee for allowing us to testify today. My name is Carlyn Cowen and I'm with the Chinese American Planning Council, CPC. CPC serves over 60,000 Asian-American immigrant and low-income New Yorkers each year. I want to uplift my partners at CACF, Asian-American Federation, and the other panelist today, and add a little bit of what we've been seeing in our communities. Last year, I came before this committee and said that it was critical that we preserve funding for human services and for immigrant service

1 because of everything that we were seeing, and this
2 year, I'm back before you to tell you that things
3 have only gotten worse in our communities. Last
4 year, I came and said that Asian-American
5 unemployment had grown 7000% in just the first couple
6 of months of the pandemic because we had seen in our
7 communities that we had been hit before we even went
8 on pause anywhere else, and this year, we see that
9 our community members are rationing through standing
10 food lines that are ever growing and they haven't
11 been able to pay bills. We lost contact with
12 community members who are not able to pay their cell
13 phone bills or their internet bill because they don't
14 have money. Last year, I came and said we needed
15 additional funding for services because all of the
16 sudden we were providing eviction prevention
17 services, benefit enrollment services, helping people
18 navigate unemployment. That is only getting worse.
19 Our phones are ringing off the hook with need after
20 need as community members continue to struggle
21 without rental support, without unemployment support,
22 had been left out of city and state aid. Last year,
23 I came and said we needed extended funding for
24 language access services because our community
25

members were struggling to get information about COVID-19 testing and tracing, about how to get care, and about best practices. This year, I come to you because our community members are still struggling with that information and because now, vaccine access is inequitable because we cannot get information to people in the languages they need. We have become a pop-up vaccine navigator in addition to everything else we're doing, and last year, I came to you and said that community-based organizations need additional funding because we were having to navigate all of these programs for our community.. (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

CARLYN COWEN: And change our programs to follow remote guidance, and this year I'm coming before you because we are seeing continuing ongoing need while our program funding has been cut while we've had to layoff staff and while I'll staff have been exhausted working overtime trying to serve the needs of our community members, which are only ongoing. It is critical that we fund all of these initiatives and increase funding for immigrant services for our community members. No specific initiative is enough because we need funding for all

of these programs, and I reject the idea that this year is a tight budget because while human services and immigrant funding has been cut, we've seen that somehow the city has found money to hire 900 additional new cops to put more cops in our schools. We need funding for our communities to serve our community members, not to police them, and it's critical that we have it this year.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'm now going to turn it to Chair Menchaca for any questions.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you to this panel really in highlighting the need for continuing the organizational work on the ground and everything that you have taken on in this pandemic. We are not out of this pandemic in any way. Our road to recovery is still in crisis mode. We need you all to keep doing the good work, and so I hope that in this hearing, and you have my commitment as Chair and you have Members of this Committee to continue to tell the story across the membership in the City Council, it is on us, as the City Council, as a City Council that votes on this budget to bring these issues to the forefront and to be able to build the budget lines

that are necessary for all these programs and now is the time. So, thank you so much and for linking it to, and Carlyn specifically, to really link it to the idea that we are, we are spending money, we are funding other things while we defund these critical services, and so we can actually make that change and the City Council has power to do that. Council Member Chin.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

CM CHIN: Thank you, Chair. I also want to thank this panel, and I think it's also very critical for you to also reach out to other Council Members, especially Council Member's district that you are helping their constituents, so that we have broader support, not just in the budget negotiations team, but across all Council Member, cause you are in all their districts, and they need to hear from you, and to hear the good work that you are doing, so we, the Council will have a stronger voice to advocate with, you know, with the Mayor to make them make sure that he puts money into these critical programs, and that will also help us with our City Council response. So, I really encourage you to, you know, submit your testimony, call those Council Member's

offices, send them, you know, card, send them letter, make sure that they are aware of the work that you do. Thank you.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you, Council Member Chin, and I just want to add as well that the budget negotiation team has yet to meet since the last budget, and so that's something that we're going to need support from the community as well to send that message to the speaker and to the Finance Chair to really bring the BNT back into work so that we can build on these ideas and actually engage, and I'm asking for support from all of you to ensure that's something that you also ask for so that we can do the work internally, and I'll hand it back to Council Committee Harbani Ahuja.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you, Chair. I'd like to just ask if any other Council Members have questions for this panel. I'm not seeing any hands. I'd like to thank this panel for their testimony. We're going to move on to our next panel. In order, I will be calling on Ellen Pachnanda, followed by Sara Deri Oshiro, followed Hasan Shafiqullah, followed by Jodi Ziesemer,

followed by Terry Lawson. Ellen Pachnanda, you may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

ELLEN PACHNANDA: Hi. Thank you. My name is Ellen Pachnanda. I'm a Supervising Attorney in the New York Immigrant Family Unity Program of Brooklyn Defender Services, known as BDS. I want to thank this Committee on Immigration, in particular, Chair Menchaca and also everyone who has testified before us and allowing us to be an audience for all the wonderful work that all these organizations are doing for our city, and I appreciate the opportunity to testify today about our budget needs to serve the immigrant community in New York City. Brooklyn Defender Services has multi-unit immigration practice which works to minimize the negative immigration consequences of criminal charges for non-citizens, represent our clients in immigration applications for immigration benefits and to defend our clients against ICE detention and deportation. As you know, we are one of the three NYIFUP providers. We provide affirmative non-detained immigration legal services through our IOI funded immigration community action program and our Padilla Criminal Immigration

Specialists provide support and expertise on criminal and family cases involving non-citizens. We echo the needs that our colleagues from legal aid and Bronx Defenders will highlight, and in my time, I will speak about the work their NYIFUP teams have accomplished during the pandemic. As this Committee is well-aware, NYIFUP is the nation's first ever universal representation program for detained immigrants facing deportation. It has been a model of access to justice nationwide and has inspired replication in many states and cities that want to stand beside their immigrant communities. There are now 18 cities and states that have committed public dollars to deportation defense with NYFA remaining the gold standard in the model. As the pandemic raged in our city in 2020, ICE continued to detain hundreds of New Yorkers in detention facility where COVID-19 spread rapidly. Because of the Council's commitment to legal services, BDS and uppers were able to respond quickly. In an around-the-clock team effort to free at-risk clients from dangerous ICE detention conditions... (crosstalk).

SGT SADOWSKY: Time has expired.

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ELLEN PACHNANDA: DBS filed Federal litigation challenging detention in the COVID era in nearly 60 cases for 85 separate clients. In March 2020, DBS staff won the ground-breaking Basank/Decker decision freeing 10 people with serious health risks from life-threatening detention. The first decision in the nation finding ICE deliberately indifferent to the safety of detained people. DBS shared our resources with other attorneys and worked with the Legal Aid Society and Bronx Defenders to file case after case throughout 2020 fighting for the liberty of the people we represent. In total the three NYFA offices have won the freedom of over 240 NYFA clients from March 2020 until now. We ask that the City Council continue funding NYIFUP to allow us to retain our flexibility to address crises and remain an intake at the detained immigration court throughout the year. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Sara Deri Oshiro to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

SARAH DERI OSHIRO: Good afternoon. My name is Sarah Deri Oshiro and I'm the Managing Director of the Immigration Practice at the Bronx Defenders. I'd like to thank the Council for its consistent support of NYIFUP and explain why our request for level funding for our program is more important than ever before. I'm just going to highlight the ways in which the advocacy of our program has continued to be vitally important for New Yorkers who are at double risk of deportation and of becoming sick during the pandemic. While many court systems paused during the pandemic, the deportation machine kept moving forward without stopping. Detained courts never closed, so there had been cases moving through the system at the Varick Street Immigration Court, even through preparing our clients remotely has been incredibly challenging given the risks that visiting them in jails carries and given the technical and practical difficulties that communicating via the deal conferences with our clients in jails presents for the program. I also just want to note that most of the laws and policies from the previous administration are actually still in effect today, and these legal obstacles make all

1 of our client advocacy more challenging and time
2 consuming since the pathways to a successful legal
3 outcome are still blocked in large part by the
4 barriers that were erected by the trump
5 administration, and this is particularly true for our
6 clients who are seeking political asylum, and they
7 continue to be stymied by the restrictive laws that
8 were put in place over the previous four years. So,
9 programmatically, the persistence of these legal
10 obstacles means that our staff must litigate cases
11 through lengthy appeals processes in many, many
12 instances, and that just hasn't changed in this past
13 year, and even if President Biden rolls back some of
14 the worse abuses of the Trump era and reverts to, for
15 example policies from the Obama era, we want to
16 remain mindful that we saw record detentions..
17 (crosstalk).

18
19 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

20 SARAH DERI OSHIRO: And deportations
21 under the Obama presidency, and so just going back to
22 the status quo is not a solution for us and for our
23 clients, and with the deportation moratorium that was
24 put in place early on in this administration blocked
25 by a Federal judge in Texas, the need for

representation is greater than era before. I last just want to flag that we have had to keep up with the changes with now-detained immigration court on a week-by-week basis for the entirety of this pandemic, and there's really no end in sight and we're unable to plan for the ways in which this court may or may not reopen at any point in the time, so, we are constantly litigating cases at the non-detained courts even though the trials keep getting postponed. So, the advocacy continues on more now than ever before and we hope that we are able to continue to offer our crucial services with level funding in this next fiscal year. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd now like to welcome Hasan Shafiqullah to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

HASAN SHAFIQULLAH: Hi, good afternoon. My name is Hasan Shafiqullah. I'm the attorney in charge of the immigration law unit at the Legal Aid Society. Thank you to Chairperson Menchaca and all the other Council Members. I'm going address NYIFUP and echo a little bit of what my colleague from Bronx

Defenders and Brooklyn Defenders have said, and I'll also touch on ICARE for unaccompanied minors and little about the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative or IOI. So, although this is starting with NYIFUP, although ICE raids have been lower over the past year than they have been before, it seems likely that detention numbers will start to go back up as things begin to return to normal and as things start to reopen, and this would include NYIFUP clients for whom we have one release during the pandemic. As Ellen mentioned, we've secured the release of over 240 people since the lockdown began since March 16th of last year, and it is possible that ICE could try to re-detain them claiming that the jails are now safe again; although the jails were never safe even before COVID and we've had ongoing issues with substandard conditions in all the ICE jails. We need to be able to continue fully staffing our NYIFUP teams in response to whatever ICE will do because even if the Biden Administration is able to roll back the enforcement priorities, you know, to how they were before Trump, under Obama, things were not great. We had more people deported under any president before until we get to Trump, and so just

going back to the status quo ante is not any relief for our clients. They're going to be at continued risk of detention and deportation, and so the need for NYIFUP funding is as great as ever. So, we call upon the Council to fully fund the three NYIFUP providers at the same level that we had last year. So, the border is seeing an influx in families and young people... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

HASAN SHAFIQULLAH: And so, for the ICARE collaborative for which Legal Aid is part, we're asking the Council to fully fund all the ICARE providers. We're going to need continued support from the Council to meet the need that we're going to be filling here in New York as people who come in through the southern border make their way here as they did 2014 to now with the surge of young people, and then finally, the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative has been, you know, it's a baseline program and we call on the city to allow it to be as flexible as possible based on what we might see coming out of the Administration this year. Maybe we'll have the DREAM Act, maybe we'll have either temporary protective status or deferred enforced

departure for Venezuela. Maybe Congress will surprise us and actually give us comprehensive immigration reform, but whatever happens, we're going to need flexibility under all of our immigration contacts to pivot to meet the need so that we're most able to help the community because if they're able to get any of these sort of statuses, they will no longer be vulnerable to removal, and so it really benefits the city to be supportive in meeting what may be, you know, a short window of opportunity to get people status. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Jodi Ziesemer to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

JODI ZIESEMER: Yes, hi, Chairperson Menchaca, Council Members, good afternoon and thank you for this opportunity to testify. My name is Jodie Ziesemer. I'm the Director of the Immigrant Protection Unit at the New York Legal Assistant Group, or NYLAG. I would like to touch upon three priorities for funding legal services. First, the rapid response legal collaborative and work. Second,

the preparing for universal representation for all immigrant New Yorkers and removal proceedings, and finally restoring funding for the Key to the City Program. In my written testimony, there are some statistics. I'm not going to belabor those at this point since many of my fellow panel members have touched on them, only to say that, you know, immigration enforcement and deportation and detention continues and is still a major issue separating our immigrant community members from their families. As Commissioner Mostofi mentioned, the City Council has been instrumental and generous in funding the rapid response legal collaborative and we've used that funding to respond to the changing landscape due to the pandemic and enforcement priorities. The need to maintain this funding at current levels is paramount. The Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, which is a collaborative comprised of NYLAG, Make the Road NY, and Unlocal was instrumental in responding to the pandemic and conditions in detention centers. We received more than 400 referrals in 2020, and we were able to serve 281 people. We filed numerous parole requests for detainees with medical conditions and suffering from the effects of COVID in detention

centers. We represented 12 individuals and habeas petitions to obtain their release. Rapid Response cases are exceedingly complex and time consuming. We take cases of people who already have deportation orders, and this requires experienced attorneys who are quick to bring cases in Federal and Circuit courts. In addition to taking on this urgent work, our team... (crosstalk).

STG. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

JODI ZIESEMER: Mentored attorneys in New York and Nationally. I'm just going to also quickly make a pitch for to follow on what Hasan said about funding the IOI initiative and expanding that to really look towards universal representation. There are two pending pieces of Legislation. One in the State of New York and one nationwide which would provide universal representation for the many people in removal proceedings. Right now, there are 284,000 New York City residents who are in active removal proceedings, 14,000 of those cases were file since the pandemic started, so we see that, you know, ICE has continued to place people in this position, and I think New York has a real opportunity to create models and programs that could address a universal

representation model if Legislation does pass, and then finally, I'll just say that in 2020, unfortunately, the City Council cut the Key to the City Program. This has been a longstanding collaboration between the New York Immigration Collation and NYLAG to provide large scale screening, information clinics, and Know Your Rights presentations located in communities. This is going to be essential to restore the funding for that program so that we can disseminate information and do screening intakes and simple application preparation for people who may benefit from some of the programs that Hasan mentioned and any reform that comes. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Terry Lawson to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

TERRY LAWSON: Good afternoon. My name is Terry Lawson and I'm the Executive Director of Unlocal. I'm also the Co-Founder and steering committee member of the Bronx Immigration partnership. I'm here today to ask the City Council

to expand funding for immigration legal services, community education outreach and organizing. Unlocal provides free high quality legal service for New York's most vulnerable immigrants, many of whom are essential workers or ineligible for benefits as many have testified today who are seeking employment authorization, asylum, DACA, SDG, lawful permanent residency, relief from removal and so much more. Last year Unlocal's legal team handled 1000 cases for people across New York City and in parts of Long Island and upstate. Our Clear Immigrant Justice project works with LGBTQ plus immigrants who are seeking asylum and Director of that project, Michael Younker was just named one of the best LGBTQ plus lawyers under 40 by the National LGBTQ Bar Association. As my colleague at NYLAG just mentioned, Unlocal is part of the Rapid Response Legal Collaborative along with Make the Road and the lawyers, paralegals, and social workers who serves on our Rapid Response team has been fighting tirelessly during this pandemic to stop deportations and get people out of detention where their physical and mental health are threatened every day. Our Rapid Response work shows just how entangled ICE and law

enforcement are and continue to be despite the efforts of advocate and community members to explain to the city law makers how local policing feeds the deportation pipeline. We have been raising the alarm about the dangers and continued harms of city officials collaborating with ICE by telling the story of one of our clients, Javier Castillo Mera Deaga (SP?), a 27-year-old Bronx man who came here when he was 7 and was turned over to ICE by the city. Over the past year, our education outreach team has been busier than ever partnering with 140 community-based organizations and schools throughout the city hosting monthly partner calls while rapidly changing... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

TERRY LAWSON: Law and policy and conducting 68 community events, 47 of which were virtual and reached 8000 attendees, and posting online resources in wide ranging topics of DACA, stimulus relief, unemployment, taxes, etc, and more. We recognize that only by providing accurate, up-to-date information are we able to counteract predatory practices of those taking advantage of the confusion and anti-immigrant rhetoric that pervades our

1 culture. Under the new Administration, laws and
2 policies continue to change (inaudible) and our
3 education and outreach teams keep the public informed
4 about these changes and their impact on immigrant New
5 Yorkers. In an era where the Biden Administration
6 continue to deport people as my colleagues stated
7 with 70 removal flights in February alone, detaining
8 asylum seekers in so-called migrant facilities and
9 simultaneously increasing avenues for affirmative
10 immigration relief, we call on the city to expand
11 funding for immigration legal services and community
12 education. We ask the City Council to continue to
13 support the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative and to
14 expand funding to allow additional legal services
15 providers to partner with the city to provide vital
16 services for our clients and community members.
17

18 Thank you very much.

19 COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank
20 you so much for your testimony. I'm now going to turn
21 it to Chair Menchaca for questions for this panel.

22 CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you. Thank you
23 Harbani and thank you to the fearless leaders of our
24 NYFUP, ICARE initiatives. If you think about what the
25 Council has done in the last seven years with

incredible leadership of the Council itself and this Committee, we've been able to increase the legal services across the board and really even fight for and win IOI baselining for services. Now, my question to all of you, and maybe I can pick a couple of you to start the conversation, but I want to really get to the heart of this question, which is expansion of legal services and the creation of a flexible set of contracts, both at the City Council, which I think we do, we have met your needs in terms of flexibility, Council funded yearly, not the baseline stuff, and then asking for that same flexibility with the baseline, and so, I guess my question, and maybe we can start with Hasan, has the Administration begun conversations with all of you about that flexibility as they understand what's going on with the possible Federal, yet to materialize, promises from a Democrat president and the things that the city needs to do to be ready to support families as those changes happen or they don't, and so have you started those conversations with the Administration as a team for NYFUP, for IOI, for ICARE, etc.?

HASAN SHAFIQULLAH: Hi, so, I'll start, and then I'll let my colleagues join in as well. So, I'm happy to report that both, from MOIA and HRA have gotten the signals that they open to flexibility to meet whatever need comes up. At this point, it's all very, you know, it's initial because we don't know what's going to happen, if anything, given the gridlock in Congress, but it's most likely that something might happen for Venezuela and GPS or DED or other things and both MOIA and HRA have, you know, like I said, have signaled an openness to being flexible with our contracts.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Okay, that's great, so we want to join you in that push, in that advocacy, and I think it should be part of our statement, our budget statement. Does anyone else want to add new information about that kind of flexibility, how structured is the request at this point that we could learn about and support you? Okay, uhm... (crosstalk).

HASAN SHAFIQULLAH: But I will just say is when things do get announced, we'll have to move very quickly, and so the more nimble, you know, we can be, you know, the better, just because I think we'll have a relatively short window of time before

applications start and we'll need to like ramp up pretty quickly to meet what whatever the need may be.

CHARI MENCHACA: So, and I guess what I want to push on, is do we wait to be re-active to a Federal Government that is still figuring itself out or do we create a proactive stance and say, we have to rethink how the changing infrastructure for the Federal Government and all the dollars that we're putting into support New Yorkers in civil, these are civil immigrant court cases, how are we thinking through that, and can we be proactive, and is that something that you all asking for?

JODI ZIESEMER: Yes, I think...
(crosstalk).

HASAN SHAFIQULLAH: Go ahead Jodi.

JODI ZIESEMER: I think this is a real opportunity, like IY funding is wonderful in that it's very broad and there's not a lot of requirements with it, which allows us to potentially represent all of the non-detained people in front of the immigration court, but there are an overwhelming number of those people, and I think if we're looking towards universal representation or even, you know, carving away at some of those numbers, really

providing as many people with legal advice and guidance as well as representation is possible, but there is room for some other programming and some, you know, initiative, some innovative initiatives that can really develop other models besides just a one-on-one, one attorney to one client representation model.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Got it. Thank you, Jodi for that, and I think that's part of this larger flexibility. How can we build the contracts to allow you for, not just flexibility and response, but to build new apparatus, new government funded support for the on-the-ground work that all of you are doing? Okay. I guess what I want to just say, just for the sake of time, is if we can get on another call just to really understand how we can articulate the need and sense of expansion for funding and the flexibility that you need now, for really anticipating all of the possibilities that we can get from Congress which is more gridlock, Obama 2.0, and just again, just failed promises that are coming, even now from this Administration, and so with that, I will hand it over to Council Member Chin.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

CM CHIN: Thank you. Yeah, I just wanted to really follow on what Chairman Menchaca said. We have to get ready and also really be; I just wanted to really say, you know, it's positive, that we're optimistic that good things will be coming, and we need to prepare to really help our immigrant neighbors. The question that I want to ask is that in New York City, right, in the Council, we are the ones that started these initiatives with the Advocacy organizations, but at a certain time, the Administration needs to take over. It needs to be part of the city's infrastructure. I mean, we're happy that, you know, some of the higher funding got baselines, but what I want to ask some of you is like where are the other programs that you are doing that can become a regular city program that should be funded by the Administration and so that this gift, you know, the Council, that we can start other new initiatives. You know, we started the great ideas and the city, what is working, the city needs to take over. So, if you can like give us some idea of what we should be advocating to be baseline, to be part of the city's infrastructures in terms of legal services, thank you.

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COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you, Council Member Chin. I just want to ask if there are any other Council Members that have questions at this time? Great, seeing no hands, I'd like to thank this panel for their testimony, and we're going to be moving on to our next panel. In order, I will be calling on Mario Russell, followed by Melissa C. Peterson, followed by Jojo Annobil, followed by Alexandra Rizio, followed by Mia Soto, followed by Maggie Wong, followed by Mon Yuck Yu. Mario Russell, you may begin your testimony when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

MARIO RUSSELL: Thank you, Council Member Menchaca and Members of the City Council Committee on Immigration. Thank you Chair and Councilwoman Chin. I'm very grateful to be here. My name is Mario Russell. I'm the Director of the Immigrant Refugee Services for Catholic Charities here in New York, and I'm just here very briefly to touch on a range of subjects and issues that Catholic Charities addresses from Day Laborer work to legal service to accompanied minor services to literacy issues, ESL issues, IOI, ICARE; the list is long, so I just simply exhorting

the Council to know that our work, in a sense, touches across a number of the panels that have been before you today. What I want to really touch on therefore, inclusive of these ideas is really how much COVID-19 has effected all of our brothers and sisters who are in these communities and areas in which we serve. An affect that is and will be harsh, disproportionate and lasting. We've been in this work for over 70 years and our division now serves close to 30,000 immigrants and refugees each year through these range of services, rather it's refugee resettlement, detention assistance, immigration, clinical work, family reunification, court representation, and of course, legal at the deepest and broadest levels, and then obviously our information and hotline referral services where we deal with about 86,000 calls a year. The pandemic forced us to retool, re-engineer, re-wire, and this job is not at all finished. You know, we distributed over 5 million dollars in cash assistance, and about 3.5 million meals just in the New York City area alone. Our experience leading up to and during the pandemic... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

MARIO RUSSELL: Was really how much our clients in the community reported anxiety, distress, you know, uncertainty, instability in so many areas of life, and understanding that this is a much existential as it is legal, as it is about income, as it is about food and security, as it is about status and security, and I would simply offer that the Trump Administration's own assaults and incredibly toxic, you know, on slot of rhetoric and social violence really created almost a pre-existing condition, that the pandemic then burrowed into and affected, so that by the time the pandemic arrived in March, our clients were already, in a sense, in a weakened and much more vulnerable state. So, it's for these reasons that we particularly urge the city today to renew its spending commitments, in particularly in two important areas; legal defense for unaccompanied children, the ICARE projects, and generally integration assistance. You know, one can simply answer a little bit of what Council Member Chin's questions in the previous panel is, what do we need? You know, Council Member, we need more case management. We need more mental health assistance. We need to understand that the 9 million or 11

million, but the 1 million in New York who are waiting for change are essentially the refugee whom we assisted 30 years ago, and there's no reason why they shouldn't receive the same transitional support, the same mental health support, the same housing support, the same economic supports, the same, again, case management assistance that refugees have historically received and continue to receive. So, I think that's a space where the Council could look at what's being done, and in a sense, that's what the Day Laborer centers do, right, but we can do more of that and broaden that piece. So, with that, I'll simply say thank, you know, I want to call on the Council again to renew and to be partners with us in the patient, but very, very real work of immigration, a welcome and building what is a just and a passionate society in this time of crisis especially. I want to remind you of this very, very sacred work, and thank you for your support. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Melissa C. Peterson to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

MELISSA C. PETERSON: Good afternoon and thank you to the Committee for this opportunity to be heard. My name is Melissa Peterson, and I'm a Supervising Attorney at the Door. The Door is a comprehensive youth development organization which has been supporting vulnerable youth in the city since 1972. We've received City Council funding through our work with the ICARE coalition, and with that funding, the Door represents nearly 200 immigrant children and youth facing deportation each year. In addition to providing legal representation, our social workers support our young people and connect them to much needed resources. The young people we serve are among those who have been hit the hardest in the wake of the pandemic. Once such woman, named Maria, lives in a shelter in the Bronx with her 3-year-old daughter, Ana. Maria is pregnant with her second child and experiencing health complications. Maria and Ana fled to the US in 2019 seeking protection from domestic violence and death threats in her home country. In early 2020, they were ordered deported. At the height of the pandemic, we've reopened both of their cases in immigration court and filed applications for asylum

and special immigrant juvenile status. Unless Maria is granted asylum, she must wait for two to three years as a special immigrant juvenile before she can apply for a green card. During this time, she will have no work authorization to work, no social security number, and no access to financial aid and other important benefits, and because of recent changes under the Trump Administration, she's at risk of deportation despite her status. The Door is involved in nationwide advocacy to promote meaningful changes in Legislation and policy that would directly impact our young people like Maria who are at risk of deportation. Without funding through ICARE, our office would be unable to continue doing such important work. The ICARE coalition is losing private funding and the continued economic support from City Council is therefore, imperative in keeping Maria, Ana, and nearly 200 other young in New York City... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

MELISSA C. PETERSON: Safe from deportation each year and assuring they are supported during this time of crisis. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Jojo Annobil to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

JOJO ANNOBIL: Good afternoon, Chair Menchaca. My name is Jojo Annobil, and I'm the Executive Director of Immigrant Justice Corp. We are a fellowship program, one of its kind in the country, and we mobilize young lawyers and college graduates to provide assistance to immigrants. First of all, let me applaud this Committee for protecting and supporting immigrants this past four years. It was very imperative that we had that support, and because of that support, we have also been able to help immigrants. Let me say that we are trying to recover from four years of repressive policies and untying immigrant rhetoric. Let me also say that we are not out of the woods yet. We know we have a broken immigration system, but the Trump Administration also broke down the processes, the systems that are in place, our immigration courts are broken. There are nearly 1.4 million cases pending. There are about 141,000 cases in New York alone. Our staff is

extremely burdened with cases that are not closing.

We haven't closed cases in the past year. Cases that are now still on our dockets. We expect a flood of families with children from the border, at least 20 to 25% of a population of 25,000. There are new initiatives coming. When we talk about flexibility and pivoting to do extra work, let's be very clear. We have so many cases right now, that when we pivot, it's not pivoting with the same stuff and with the same resources. We are pivoting with additional resources because we have cases that in that we still need, we still have that... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

JOJO ANNOBIL: When we talk about pivoting, let's talk about expanding resources and funding to be able to do that. Also, Mario had mentioned something about wellness, mental health. Mental health is two ways, both for our clients and for our staff. Our staff have been traumatized as much by the pandemic than also by how challenging the work has been. Therapy sessions cost a lot of money. Healthcare providers only give you two shots or three shots, and are our staff are paying for some of these things out-of-pocket. We need to be able to help

1 them be able to do this, and so as we come to you
2 this afternoon, yes, we are open to having further
3 conversations, I just want to say thank you for
4 supporting us. Thank you for helping us protect
5 immigrants. We are here to work with you. There's a
6 lot of work to be done. I also want to ask you to
7 lend your voice to what is happening in Washington
8 today and tomorrow and the day after. This city is
9 in a unique position because you've been at the
10 forefront of helping immigrants. You've put a lot of
11 money behind this effort. This is the time for you
12 to lend your voice to a humane reform system, to lend
13 your voice to what happens with immigration, a humane
14 system that doesn't deport everybody or makes
15 everyone a priority for deportation. We've seen what
16 that pandemic can do. No one should be left in the
17 shadows. Leaving people in the shadows is a risk to
18 all our community. Let's make sure that that does
19 not happen. Thank you so much.

21 COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank
22 you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome
23 Alexandra Rizio to testify. You may begin when you
24 are ready.

25 SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

ALEXANDRA RIZIO: Thank you to the Committee on Immigration for convening this hearing for inviting us to speak. My name is Alexandra Rizio, and I'm a Managing Attorney at the Safe Passage Project, a nonprofit legal services organization that provides free representation to immigrant children facing deportation. We serve children who live in the five boroughs of New York City and the two counties of Long Island. The support of the City of New York has been instrumental in our work. No immigrant, as you know, not even a child is appointed a lawyer in immigration court. If the child cannot afford to hire a lawyer, they will be forced to defend themselves alone against a trained government prosecutor and a judge with deportation back to dangerous conditions as the likely outcome. Safe Passage Project helps correct this injustice by providing free attorneys to kids. Beyond legal services, our social work team addresses the broader needs of clients such as school enrollment, homelessness, access to healthcare, psychological services, and public benefits. As I mentioned, City Council has been a stellar support that allows us to fight on behalf of young

immigrants. You fund our work through the Unaccompanied Minor's initiative and IOI grant stream. Without your unwavering support, which we've had since 2014, we would not have been able to serve the over 1200 clients that Safe Passage serves. In fact, the City Council's support for the ICARE collaborative is ground-breaking on a national level and has shown that local initiatives that support universal representation for immigrants, essentially filling a gap where the Federal Government refuses to act is not only possible, but successful. Thank you. The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare and heightened many of the inequalities in our system. Undocumented immigrants may work in essential jobs, but most lack job security, are less likely to have health insurance, and can be hesitant to seek emergency medical treatment. To compound these problems, undocumented immigrants have been deliberately excluded from most economic recovery programs. At the same time, our immigration work didn't stop. Filings still had to be made on time, kids were still being entered into removal proceedings, and... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

ALEXANDRA RIZIO: Since the first cases of COVID-19 were reported in New York City, our social work team has worked to connect young people with essential resources including food, housing, and medical help. In response to the urgent needs of our clients, Safe Passage launched an emergency cash assistance program in April 2020. Over the course of the year, we distributed \$40,000 in assistance to 130 households. Our social work team has made more than 500 referrals to an array of resources including connecting clients to mental health, medical health, health insurance, food assistance, and shelters. We likewise continue to struggle on the immigration front. We've conducted legal intake screenings for 285 clients since April 2020, filled out hundreds of applications and motions. The deportation machine never stopped, so our teams worked tirelessly to ensure that our clients were protected. Funding for organizations like ours is never guaranteed, but the need for services is greater than ever. The ICARE collaborative was very successful in ensuring that New York's child immigrants are represented in court, but the Robinhood portion of the funding from this public/private partnership is coming to a close. We

recognize that these are very uncertain times,
particularly from a budgeting perspective, but I ask
that the City Council to continue elevate the need
for these services. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank
you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Mia
Soto to testify. You many begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

MIA SOTO: Good afternoon Chairperson
Menchaca and Committee Members for giving me the
opportunity to present testimony today, and for
really, this tremendous assistance. My name is Mia
Soto, and I am the Community Organizer in Health
Justice Program at the New York Lawyers for Public
Interest where we work to really ensure that
undocumented immigrants have access to healthcare
services in New York City. During these
unprecedented public health crises, I urge the
Council to support renewed funding for the immigrant
health initiative which has saved lives and improved
health across the city. New York Lawyers of the
Public Interest is privileged to be part of the City
Council's Immigrant Health Initiative and we thank
you for that support. At a time when access to

medical care information is crucial and misinformation can really endanger our communities, this support has allowed us to expand our work, education immigrant New Yorkers with serious health conditions, their healthcare providers, and of course, legal service providers about how to access healthcare barriers and how to stay safe during this pandemic. You know, the Immigrant Health Initiative funding has also support greatly NYLPI's work seeking to improve access to healthcare services in immigration detention facilities and we with your support, we have also been able to provide comprehensive screenings and legal representations to individuals, particularly to those who are and who have serious healthcare conditions, including support for individuals in terms of providing information to, of course, for financial assistance, food banks, housing relief and to really meet the intersecting needs of our client community. In additionally with your support, you have also allowed us to support eligible immigrants to enroll in state funded Medicaid which of course, improves access to Medicaid has had lives changing and often... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

MIA SOTO: Thank you again, and today I hope funding continues for the year 2022 for both NYLPI and our community partners. We look forward to continuing our work to premiere New Yorkers access to healthcare services. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Maggie Wong to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

MAGGIE WONG: Hi. Thank you, Chair Menchaca. Thank you, Councilwoman Chin, and also the Immigration Committees and for the opportunities. My name is Maggie Wong. I'm from the Charles B. Wang Community Health Center. We are a (inaudible) center and we have sites in Manhattan and Queens. We provide primary care services to medically underserved population including immigrants, underinsured, and limited English proficient foreign born Asian Americans who are living in New York City. We're calling regarding your (inaudible) immigration status, language status, or ability to pay. During the pandemic, we continued to open 7 days a week (inaudible) now we are in the midst of the COVID

pandemic. The challenges are greater that we continue to bridge the critical gaps to accessing high quality healthcare in the community through COVID testing, COVID vaccinations as an echo to Councilwoman Chin just mentioned that. We expand our outreach through radio programs, TV programs, newspaper and also social media. We pay for it. It's not free. So, we believe that that's the way that we can reach our population, our local media that spread the information to our community through the language they speak. Now, I'm testifying for the Immigration Health Initiative and Asian American immigrants face health disparities in cancers, like breast cancers and also liver cancers, lung cancers and different chronic diseases such as heart disease, hypertension, and diabetes, especially mental health... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

MAGGIE WONG: And an increasing number of people suffering mental health during the pandemic. So, the funding allows us to expand our outreach into communities to inform and educate the residents regarding availability of cultural, linguistic appropriate healthcare services. So, and also we provide health insurance resources, and we fund a lot

of people with insurance because of the pandemic and also because of their immigration status, they are afraid to get the health insurance. So, thank you for permitting me to be here and I hope that we can continue to get the funding from City Council for immigrant health institute. Thank you so much.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Mon Yuck Yu to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

MON YUCK YU: Good afternoon. My name is Mon Yuck Yu, Executive Vice President at the Academy of Medical and Public Health Services. Thank you, Chair Menchaca for the opportunity to testify. AMPHS is a non-profit organization in Sunset Park that works that bridge a health equity gap among communities of color by providing free clinical screenings and bi-lingual mental health therapy integrated with individualized health education and social services to the immigrant populations of New York City, free of cost and regardless of immigration status. During COVID-19, our work has

become more important than ever before. Offering over \$130,000 in cash assistance and 200,000 pounds of food in weekly food distribution and reaching over 400,000 people through our outreach and education efforts. I want to tell you the story of Maria, an undocumented immigrant. She never learned to read or write, turned away at the hospital reception because she could not communicate in English. Maria borrowed money to see a private doctor to find out that she had COVID-19 and diabetes in March of last year. When she came to AMPHS, our social worker connected her to follow up care, helped her navigate free treatment in complicated online patient portals so she could understand her results, and helped to secure funding for diabetes medications while our mental health therapist provided free ongoing care in Spanish. Our cash assistance program helped her pay her bills and we even enrolled her in our adult literacy classes with individualized tutoring. Maria is one of the 1500 residents that receive food deliveries and distributions from us every week. This is the type of illicit support that organizations like ours provide. I would like to urge the city council to consider restoring and

expanding the immigrant health initiative and mental health service for vulnerable communities to support this work. Over the course of the pandemic, request for assistance have tripled. Every day, our team yields 50 to 60 calls for individuals like Maria seeking clinical and social assistance. We have a waiting list of nearly 100 individuals seeking support from our free mental health services which we cannot meet our current funding levels.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

MON YUCK YU: AMPHS has been at the forefront of COVID-19 testing and vaccine education in imaginable ways. Our community health workers offer interpretations in Spanish, Arabic, and (inaudible) dialects to help community member to navigate the healthcare systems. Every month, we are holding in language workshops and distributing thousands of pieces of literature to community members through canvassing and food distribution events and posting in over 700 businesses, and since March, we distributed over 100,000 pieces of PPE. The city's vaccine average has been less than equitable and it's organizations like ours that are closing the gap. Immigrant communities average about

12% in the vaccine uptake compared to 35% of the majority of the white communities. The upper westside community, for example, with half of Sunset Park's population has vaccinated 30% more people than Sunset Park. We are working with hospitals to get vaccine blocks for our community members, connecting 253 people to vaccines every week, many who are telling us we are the first organization to offer a linguistically competent service to connect them to the vaccine, and even through we serve as a vaccine navigation pop-up site, we are not funded to do any of this work through (inaudible) even through our staff spent of 60 hours per week on this work, and we're asked to seek opportunities with the few T2 funded organizations that don't have the obligation to partner with any other groups. Linked to replicate the census funding model to sustain this work for nonprofits are meeting community needs on the ground. We also urge the city to restore our baseline with 12 million dollars in adult literacy funding, and during the pandemic, adult literacy classes have served as a lifeline for community members during the pandemic to not only help secure language access skills necessary, but as a platform

for COVID-19 information and resources examination,
as a community in solidarity and a source for mental
health support. We loaned devices to community
members that could not afford internet access for
their classes which dips into our reserves due to our
funding cuts this year, and the City Council must
fund emergency food pantries for CBOs like ours which
are completely unfunded at this time, and finally,
COVID-19 has demonstrated the need for a coordinated
community response to ensure that the information is
circulated in the communities and that community
voices are elevated on a policy level with the city
allocating 20 million dollars in funding to start the
pandemic responses. Funding must be allocated to
involve community grassroots organizations, many of
which have been left out of plenty of conversations,
and risk once again, leaving immigrant communities
from this response. We are here to support those who
are most marginalized, and we ask that you be here to
make our work possible. I humbly thank this City
Council for this opportunity to support and for your
support for organizations like ours for providing on
the ground, culturally competent services during this
challenging time.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now turn it to Chair Menchaca for any questions for this panel.

CHAIR MENCHACA: I want to say thank you to the panel, to all of the organizations that are holding the legal services, the healthcare, the mental healthcare issues, thank you for re-aligning our work, not just in the work that New York City experiences and in these initiatives that we need to refund and expand, but as it pertains to the federal conversation about what it looks like when government is filling the void of services to immigrants for language access, to legal services, for health, the city is clearly not meeting that gap, and that's why we have you, and that's why we need to continue fund you, so I want to say thank you again for doing that work, and we have your back. We're going to continue to fight for that and keep focusing on the local Council Members that represent you and organizations where you are at. We're going to need that energy to push for these budget successes. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you, Chair. I'm just going to ask if any other

Council Members have questions at this time. Council
Member Chin.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

CM CHIN: Yeah, I just also wanted to
thank this panel and all the advocacy organization
for the work that you do with our immigrant
population and echo what Chair Menchaca said. We
need your voices, and we need your support in pushing
the city and other Council Members and Mary, what you
talked about, yes, you know, it's not just legal
services, but case management, mental health service,
health services, a broad range of services that our
community needs, and we need to fight for. We have
to be very optimistic with the Federal dollars that
are coming and to make sure that immigrant
populations get their share of that, and that we
don't get left out in this next stimulus package
that's coming to the city. So, we need all you to be
on the alert and let us know what we should be doing,
and we need to support. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank
you, Council Member. Seeing no other Council Member
question, I'm going to thank this panel for their

testimony, and I'll moving on to our next panel. In order, I will be calling on Sienna Fontaine, followed by Nicole Rojas, followed Ernie Collette, followed by Henry Lajara, followed by Charlene Obernauer, followed by Tito Sinha, followed by Gianina Enriquez, followed by Cole Dennis. Sienna Fontaine, you may begin your testimony when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

SIENNA FONTAINE: Good afternoon. My name is Sienna Fontaine, and I'm the Legal Director at Make the Road New York. We thank Chair Menchaca as always for your leadership and the Committee for your partnership, and the opportunity to testify about the proposed budget priorities that we believe center the crucial needs of immigrant New Yorkers as they continue to endure this devastating pandemic. Make the Road has over 20 years of experience serving low-income and immigrant communities and our programmatic offers, community organizing, transformative education, policy innovation and crucial health and legal services, all have continued uninterrupted throughout the pandemic. You're all aware and I've heard even more today about the devastation this pandemic has ripped on our

communities we service in central Queens, Brooklyn, Staten Island, areas which have been epicenters of the pandemic at different moments this past year. Our communities have been sick, have lost work and income, been forced to endure unsafe working conditions, and have been excluded from government relief packages. Additionally, immigrant communities continue to face aggressive ICE enforcement and risk of family separation. We ask the Council to stand with us in our values and fund the following priorities this coming year. One, health services including maintaining current funding for ending the epidemic, access immigrant health initiatives, and restoring funding to the managed care consumer assistance program. The city should increase funding for the emergency food assistance program to support food for more than 500 pantries and soup kitchens in the city which are keeping immigrant communities fed. Two, supporting workers across the board including restoring funding towards the consortium for worker education and its network of partners, many of whom you are hearing from today which includes 5.1 million for the Jobs to Build On program and 2.2 million for worker service centers. Renew and expanded funded

for low wage worker support services is critical including support for the low wage worker initiatives that funds legal services and averages and organizes efforts. Past funding has allowed groups like the Road to represent immigrant workers on wage theft and discrimination claims... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

SIENNA FONTAINE: And their right, work that's really urgent during these uncertain economic times and as essential workers continue to face different challenges in the workplace. Three, continued robust funding for immigration legal services. You've heard today specially for the rapid response legal collaborative and other deportation defense work. These projects provide critical representation for community members who are detained and facing deportation, have orders of removal, at risk, detention, as you heard, and you know, detained clients remain a high-risk of COVID exposure and face serious delays in securing any relief, and lastly, adult education continues to be critical in this moment, and we request that the Council restore our baseline funds and further invest in the adult literacy pilot project that the New York City

Coalition for Adult Literacy has proposed and ensure that every adult student who needs it is provided the necessary hardware and free internet to be able to access online education platforms. There's much we have to do, but we must fund our values. Thank you again to the Committee Chair, the entire Committee for your ongoing support and consideration, and we're excited to work with you to ensure that these community needs are prioritized in the upcoming budget. Thanks so much.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Nicole Rojas to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

NICOLE ROJAS: Good afternoon everyone. My name is Nicole Rojas. I am the Community Organizer for the Mixteca Organization. Thank you, Council Member Carlos Menchaca and the Committee on Immigration for allowing me to testify. Mixteca Organization is a community-based organization located in Sunset Park, Brooklyn that addresses the critical needs in health, education, social, and

1 legal issues facing the Mexican and Latin American
2 immigrant community. Over the years, our space has
3 become a second home to community members. It is a
4 safe space to receive services free of cost and in
5 their language. Twenty years later, as our
6 organization continues to grow, so do the needs of
7 the community, especially in the midst of the COVID-
8 19 pandemic. When COVID-19 hit, our phone lines
9 remained opened, and our work continued. When other
10 institutions and agencies closed their doors on our
11 members due to language or legal status, it was up to
12 us, an all-female migrant woman team to continue
13 supporting our community. Our community was heavily
14 impacted due to the lack of ability, to adequate
15 information due to technology, literacy, and
16 language. Community members called and messaged us
17 in desperate need of money to survive, feed their
18 family after losing their jobs and even family
19 members. We began fund raising right away to support
20 community members. A few months later, we were
21 granted funds by MOIA to support immigrants excluded
22 from the stimulus relief. Through that funding, we
23 were able to support 530 families through it was not
24 enough when we received over 3000 applications from
25

all over New York City. In the past, we received funding programs like MOIA's Know Your Rights Project. In September 2019 to June 2020, we conducted over 40 KYRs, Know Your Rights workshops and reached over 600 community members. We continue this work in the midst of the pandemic and adjust it to meet the needs of the community as best we could. This year, we were not granted the project. We need funding to continue projects like these that empower community... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

NICOLE ROJAS: The Biden Administration has brought back hope for immigration reform, La Lucha Sigue. If this passed, the city is not prepared to support the community. I call for funding to provide sufficient immigrant friendly services. I call for funding for free and safe legal services. I call for language access for the indigenous community, for languages like Quiche, Nahuatl, Mixteca, Quecha, and Mixe just to name a few. I call for increased funding for identifications for our undocumented community members who remain invisible to the system. I call for economic relief for our immigrant community, many

of which are now facing eviction. I call for funding for community-based organizations like us to continue doing this crucial work. Lastly, I'm the daughter of immigrants, daughter of a deported parent who was handed over by the NYPD after my parent fell victim of legal service fraud that placed him on deportation proceedings without him knowing. I call to defund the NYPD. If the city offered sufficient well-funded safe legal services, I believe other little girls like me would not be left without their father-daughter dance at their quincenera. Thank you for your time.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Ernie Collette to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

STG. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

ERNIE COLLETTE: Good afternoon. Thank you so much to the Committee for allowing me to testify. My name is Ernie Collette. I'm the Supervising Attorney with the Immigration Law Project at Mobilization for Justice, a nonprofit providing humanitarian and family-based immigration relief to

our clients. One of the benefits of actually going towards the end of testimonies is you kind of get an opportunity to provide a bit of an epilogue and maybe, sort of a warning for the future with regards to services for our city. There are many factors that continue to impact immigrant communities in New York and emphasize the need for increased funding. As some of the presenters have already presented before, numerous policies implanted by the prior Administration including the public charge rule, Attorney General MBIA decision to restrict and attempt to eliminate asylum all together. USCIS case processing delays, especially with employment authorization cards so that individuals have access to be able to be employed, and a lack of proper customer services to effectuate those problems have made it so that the routine becomes complex, and the complex becomes exceedingly difficult, but despite those policies, we continue to see increasing number of immigrants asking for our services. With regard to the immigration court, the prior Administration restricted the rights of immigration judges to control their own dockets, and that's especially traumatic for individuals who are SIJ eligible or are

SIJ approved prioritizing removal, especially when cases are pro se, and doing that above due process rights. While we monitor the new Administrations attempts to effectively eliminate bad policies to support an agenda that supports our clients, the reality is that's actually going to increase the needs of our services. The reinstatement of the migrant protection protocol across the southern border as we've seen through prior spring caravans will likely result in more individuals coming to New York and seeking legal assistance. Our partners and our agencies have seen an increase of individuals asking if they're eligible for DACA and trying to receive initial DACA applications. In fact, if Congress passes its... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

ERNIE COLLETTE: Of 2021, even if it's in its current iteration, that could increase eligibility for a pathway of upward to 3 million people for dreamers TPS and their family members for citizenship and it could be as big potentially as 11 million people. The history of our city suggests that many individuals eligible for the sorts of reforms that we will try to help will be in New York,

will be little or no income and will need assistance adjudicating their cases quickly to meet their need. Finally, and of course, the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted the immigrant communities in New York, we have an immigration backlog that has been effectively frozen even though we have continued to adjudicate cases and meet statutory and judicial deadlines. Well over a million people all over the nation are waiting for their case to be adjudicated, and as a result of all this, increasing funding to allow for eventually a reduction of these backlogs, but not only understand that what this new Administration is effectively going to create more wonderful opportunities as we welcome and promote, but need to be adequately reinforced and supported by the city in order to ensure that no immigrant is left behind. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Henry Lajara to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

HENRY LAJARA: Yes, good afternoon everyone, and thank you to all involved and present. My name is Henry Lajara. I'm one of the legal service providers at Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice. We're a community-based organization founded in 1994. We're located in the southeast Bronx (inaudible) communities. We serve a diverse population covering all portions of the globe. We not only assist our Bronx community, but accommodate all of metropolitan New York. Since 2006, we've guided our immigrant community through the complex world of immigration. We offer in depth consultations, file pertinent applications and serve as liaisons between our government and state agencies including USCIS and the National Visa Center. We are two case managers and two immigration attorneys. Since then, we seen thousands of clients and helped saved hundreds and thousands of dollars in attorney's fees. We've also deterred our community from the services of predatory notaries. Because of COVID, there's a high number of unemployed immigrants permitted on occasions, (inaudible) help fund the number of USCIS applications fees, mainly DACA. This philanthropy was met with tears of gratitude and a

client allegiance that lives on. All our services are free and confidential. We are currently funded by IOI and legal services CSBG. In 2016, YMPJ helped formed the Bronx Immigration partnership, BIP is a group of 16 legal service providers who address immigration issues who are list served. We confidentially share cases and recommend best practices. We also support the community by providing legal clinics, we... (crosstalk).

STG. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

HENRY LAJARA: DACA, TPS, and current immigration trends. Because of these services, potential clients are calling us nonstop. Our clients are pleased with our services evidenced by their repeat visits and referrals made. Therefore, there has been an increase in demand for this service. So, the Mayor's 2022 preliminary budget currently reduces our immigration services so that's why we're asking for continued support. So, I want to thank you for all of this.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you so much for your testimony. I'd like to now

welcome Charlene Obernauer to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

CHARLENE OBERNAUER: Hi everyone. My name is Charlene Obernauer. I'm the Executive Director of NYCOSH. I want to thank Chairman, Council Member Menchaca for your time, and thanks to everybody who has been on here this whole time listening to all of the stories. I think everyone should be funded, but, I'm here to talk about NYCOSH and our program. So, we have the New York Health Nail Salons Coalition, and we run the New York nail salon workers school, and as many folks can imagine, nail salon workers have been really in a devastating position during the pandemic. They have been mostly out-of-work, even now that the nail salons have been reopened, a lot of workers are still not welcomed back into their salons because there aren't enough customers, and what our nail salon worker school does is provide people with the nail salon license so that they can be licensed manicurist in New York State, and for many workers without their license, they're less likely to be rehired during the reopening, and they're also more likely to be exploited on the job without having the

ability or feeling like they have the ability to speak up because they were never licensed to begin with, and our school really looks at how we can train folks who have limited literacy. A lot of our program is actually based on limited literacy folks and it's directed toward Spanish speaking and Napoli speaking workers, and since 2016, we've helped 800 workers graduate from the school and ultimately get their license. We've also added to our curriculum, information about COVID-19 and little things like how to wear masks. You know, folks are still not really aware of how to effectively wear something a facemask, and so we're providing people with that information as well as, you know, how to make sure they're not spreading COVID-19 on the job when they're back in their salons. So, this is all really critical information so that nail salon workers can stay safe, so that their customers can stay safe, and so that they can effectively be safe... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

CHARLENE OBERNAUER: So, we're asking for this funding to be continued. We've received both discretionary funded as well as the low wage worker fund and we love your support. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you so much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Tito Sinha to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

TITO SINHA: Thank you very much. My name is Tito Sinha, and I'm the Supervising Attorney for Workers' Rights and TakeRoot Justice, and we thank the Committee for this opportunity. I am here to testify on behalf of the Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaboratives, CILEC in support of increased, robust, sustainable, and multi-year baseline funding for the low wage worker initiative. As we arrive at the one-year mark of the onset of the pandemic, we impress upon this body, the ongoing urgent need for Workers' Right advocacy for low wage documented and undocumented workers; the vast majority of whom are essential workers performing essential services on the frontlines. Much of our work under the low wage worker initiative is geared toward recovering money that was lawfully due to immigrant families from their employer and which can provide them with substantial economic assistance, especially during the pandemic. For example, since

January 2020, TakeRoot Worker's Right team has obtained approximately \$800,000 in settlements from employers who have provided much needed recovery, actual money for low wage and immigrant workers who are owed such wages. We have also responded to an increased need in immigrant communities to provide Know Your Rights training for organizers and workers on the new protections and remedies under the pandemic. There is no other dedicated city funding that ensures that the city's low wage and immigrant workers have redressed from wage theft discrimination and other workplace injustices. We call upon the Administration and the City Council to continue their commitment to the city's low wage and immigrant workers by renewing and expanding the baseline low wage worker initiative for employment-related legal services from 2 million to 6 million dollars for employment-related services and provide an additional 1.5 million for the low wage worker support. This expansion will stabilize the funding so low wage and immigrant workers can continue to receive the essential advocacy... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

TITO SINHA: They need through vital civil legal services and community outreach. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Gianina Enriquez to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

GIANINA ENRIQUEZ: Good afternoon, Chairman Menchaca and Members of the Committee. My name is Gianina Enriquez. I am a Community Organizer from Queens Museum, an immigrant Latina working for her community. Thank you for continued support to the Queens Museum during these difficult times and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. As well, a special thank you to the Council Member Moya for coming to visit us at the museum last week for the launch of our new immigrant business initiative (inaudible). Like other members of New York City's cultural institutions group, the operation of Queens Museum was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, we continued to offer essential programs and research to advance and

support public health, public life, and public benefits of Queens residents and especially the immigrant community. Today, I would like to highlight a few of our longstanding and current programs. For more than 10 years, in furnishing with the Queens library, the Queens Museum New New Yorkers program offers free multi-lingual art classes for adult immigrant learners. New New Yorkers work closely with accomplished professional artists through courses that emphasize the arts, technology, and English language acquisitions. Since June 2020, Queens Museum has been working (inaudible) to serve more than 20,000 people from Corona, and more still flourishing as a food distribution site and cultural food pantry. Every (inaudible) of food items between 400 and 950 families. We also provide education handouts, kits and outdoor activities for the children. We now serving as a self-testing site in furnishing with New York City Health and Hospital Test and Trace Program. As I mentioned before, (inaudible)... (crosstalk).

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time expired.

GIANINA ENRIQUEZ: (Inaudible) is an online workshop service (inaudible) the owner of our

gift shop. Finally, the Give the Garden a Home is a program by families in Corona, Queens with plant seeds and materials edible things in their home. Give the Garden a Home was (inaudible) local communities gardeners. The report back and pictures we have received are a ray of joy as kids and parents engage together in transplanting and caring for the new plants. Thank you to the Committee for this opportunity to share information about Queens Museum programming. We look forward to our continued partnership with the Council and value our leadership as we make our way through the crisis and look to rebuild the economy. Thank you.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you so much for your testimony. I'd like to now welcome Cole Dennis to testify. You may begin when you are ready.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

COLE DENNIS: Hi everyone. I'm Cole Dennis. A resident of the upper westside and a member of the New York City Democratic Socialist of America. During all the of the time that I spend outside of my apartment in the past year, was spent

1 protesting the NYPD, its racism, and its outrageous
2 allocation from city spot check. For this reason, I
3 want to thank Chair Menchaca for voting no on the
4 city's budgets last year. The NYPD doesn't keep
5 immigrants safe. I ask that the Council fight to
6 take from the NYPD's budget to instead, allocate to
7 service that benefit the undocumented community
8 during the pandemic when they are in the most need
9 and give special attention to the Asian community
10 that NYPD has failed to keep safe during the rise of
11 hate crimes against the community. Thank you for
12 your time.
13

14 COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank
15 you for your testimony. I'd like to now turn it to
16 Chair Menchaca for any questions for this panel.
17

18 CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you Harbani, and I
19 want to again, say thank you as we get closer to
20 ending this hearing. This hearing has highlighted a
21 lot of issues and I'm really thankful that each of
22 you in the organization work that you are doing
23 really highlighted the intricate nature of a worker
24 and experience something about the nail salon
25 workers, I'm thinking about all of the families that
are delayed in their justice at the Federal Courts.

1 All of these pieces continue to be part of this
2 larger fabric of what the city can do right now to
3 support people. People that are trying to get
4 vaccinated, trying to get a job, trying to get an
5 adult literacy class, trying to get a lawyer that's
6 safe and I'm just, you know, I have some final
7 thoughts that I'll share in a little bit, but this
8 panel just really took it home in terms of what each
9 of you are already doing to fill that gap. Rather
10 you're in Sunset Park like AMPHS and Mixteca or in
11 Queens like Make the Road, you're filling that gap
12 and in a lot of ways, this infrastructure is already
13 there. You're already doing the work. What's
14 preventing the city from funding, and to the most
15 recent point made by Cole, we can do that by
16 defunding the NYPD, an agency that has continued to
17 create a lot of issues with immigrants as we saw this
18 summer and that we all not only, many of us made the
19 call to end when ICE and DHS was protecting
20 precincts. This is one of many examples that show
21 the collusion between the NYPD and ICE. So, I just
22 want to say thank you for your courage and let's
23 continue. Do we have any more folks that are
24 testifying?

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: I just like to quickly ask if any other Council Members have questions for us? Council Member Chin.

SGT. SADOWSKY: Time starts now.

CM CHIN: Thank you. I also really wanted to thank this panel, especially all the services providers and advocacy. Some of the points that you brought up that I don't, I want to take note of it, is the mental health services for the staff. So, we, you know, don't forget supporting the people who are doing this work, and helping the immigrant community to make sure that they are supported and also I think what Tito was talking about, the program that you're doing, helping worker recover wage theft, I mean, that is so critical because you know, how dare they, during this pandemic that they're still taking advantage of these low income workers, and I'm so glad that there are, you know, lawyers out there, organizations out there that are helping these immigrants, and also, we got to make sure that, you know, as we move forward, you know, the hopefulness of, you know, from Washington, that we want to make sure that our community is not going be taken advantage of from all these immigration fraud and all

of these things that we heard of in the past. So, we have to make sure that we provide the sufficient funding, and also make sure that some of these works are baseline or get incorporated because the infrastructure is there for city to really help the immigrant community and we have to make sure that you are sufficiently funded. So, I just want to thank you again for all the great work that you are doing for our community.

COMMITTEE COUNCIL HARBANI AHUJA: Thank you, Council Member Chin. At this point, we have concluded public testimony. If we have inadvertently missed anyone that is registered to testify today and has yet to be called, please use the Zoom raise hand function now, and I will call on you in the order that your hand has been raised. Okay, I'm not seeing any hands. So, that concludes our public testimony for the day, and I will turn it back to Chair Menchaca for closing remarks.

CHAIR MENCHACA: Thank you to Harbani and Elizabeth and Laura, and Tony and all of the staff, Florentine, Crillian on the Finance side, thank you all for today. Today, we have learned a lot, and many of these things that we have learned today were

1 already things that we knew seven years ago when we
2 first came in and started fighting together on this
3 Committee and in this City Council, and what we've
4 learned is that the city is not in compliance with
5 Local Law 30, and so, what can we do? One of the
6 ways that we can resolve this issue is through
7 funding, to bring more language interpretation,
8 services that are asked of and built by the
9 communities that are currently serving our
10 communities, and also bring in adult literacy courses
11 to refunding and to by six-fold, fully funding the
12 need that is in our communities. These two elements
13 will help support the engagement of communities that
14 are found in the blind spot, that this current
15 Mayoral Administration, the State and the Federal
16 Government continue to allow, but it is this City
17 Council that has supported you all in the work that
18 you are doing on the ground through the Day Laborer
19 organizations, through the low income worker
20 initiative, through the adult literacy initiatives;
21 there's so many pieces of what we are holding right
22 now that as Council Member Chin said, need to be
23 institutionalized to ensure that you have a horizon,
24 that you have a flexible contract, that you have
25

1 enough dollars to support the most vulnerable, and
2 we're not going to be able to solve all those issues
3 unless we have the support of you all. So, push us
4 as Council Members in your Districts to ensure that
5 they know how important this is. Council Member Chin
6 and I have been on this call this whole time, pushing
7 and understanding what you are asking for, but we
8 cannot do it alone. Also ensure that you can help
9 us, you have to be in T-going, that's a big issue
10 that I have been asking for the Speaker to really
11 restart. You should know that those things are not
12 happening yet, but that can't happen unless the
13 pressure happens, but the pressure, I think, needs to
14 beyond the City Council. We need to bring the State
15 energy and the State Legislators and Federal
16 delegation from the Congress that we sent to Congress
17 to ensure that the city budget can reflect the needs
18 that we can make happen here as we push them to do
19 that in their budgets. That's how we get things
20 done. That's how we can tell a story of New York,
21 the immigrant story, the story of resilience, the
22 story of empowerment, especially on this
23 International Day of Women, a very auspicious day
24 today that we are calling on our New Yorkers to get
25

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involved. So, with that, I want to say thank you again, and this ends our budget hearing, but this does not end the budget negotiations, and so stay engaged, build your campaigns, make them connect, and we will be there to make sure that that voice lands in the City Council and shapes the next budget. Thank you so much, and I call this hearing to end. Thank you all, thanks again.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

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



Date May 11, 2021