



Mayor's Office of
Immigrant Affairs
Bitta Mostofi
Commissioner

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Testimony of Commissioner Bitta Mostofi
NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

Before a Hearing of the New York City Council Committee on Immigration:

“Oversight – MOIA Annual Report”

Thank you to Chair Menchaca and the members of the Committee on Immigration. My name is Bitta Mostofi, and I am the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA). I am pleased to be here with Sabrina Fong, our Deputy Director of Research and Policy Advisor at MOIA, who is also available to answer questions.

I am delighted to testify today about MOIA's annual report, which covered our work in 2018, and which was published this March. The annual report is a testament both to the extensive work that our office does in serving immigrant New Yorkers, as well as to the crucial research and analysis that MOIA conducts day-to-day. MOIA works with quantitative and qualitative data to inform program and policy design both for MOIA and our sister agencies, engage in advocacy at all levels of government, and tailor our outreach to communities in need.

My testimony will discuss some highlights from the annual report, our analysis of demographic and program data, and how we use that analysis to inform our work. I look forward to discussing this important work with you.

Highlights

This year's annual report, our second ever, included new data on immigrant New Yorkers and a detailed discussion of MOIA's successes in 2018.

Demographic profile

Beginning with a few notable demographic highlights, I want to start with the decline of undocumented immigrants living in New York City. This decline is in line with national trends that predate the Trump Administration: other research has shown that there has been a decline over the last decade. As noted in our report, this can be attributed to a number of reasons including a weak U.S. economy following the 2008 housing market collapse, improved economic conditions in Mexico, as well as heightened enforcement at the border.¹

In this year's annual report we presented a profile on household and family level data for the first time. This data shows that millions of U.S.-citizen New Yorkers are deeply connected to the undocumented population. Nearly 60 percent of New Yorkers live in households with at least one immigrant, and over 1 million New Yorkers live in mixed-status households, including over 200,000 U.S.-born children who live with undocumented parents or other household members.

Included in our demographic profile of the immigrant population of New York City is an exploration of the many economic contributions of immigrants. We know that over 75 percent of undocumented immigrants are in the labor force. That is higher than the labor force participation rate for the U.S.-born population, which is about 65 percent. Immigrant New Yorkers are employed in a wide range of industries, with over a quarter working in the key industries of

¹ See Warren, Robert, "US Undocumented Population Continued to Fall from 2016 to 2017, and Visa Overstays Significantly Exceeded Illegal Crossings for the Seventh Consecutive Year," Center for Migration Status (January 2019), available at <http://cmsny.org/publications/essay-2017-undocumented-and-overstays/> and Passel, Jeffrey S. and Cohn, D'Vera, "U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Total Dips to Lowest Level in a Decade," Pew Research Center (November 2018), available at <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2018/11/27/u-s-unauthorized-immigrant-total-dips-to-lowest-level-in-a-decade/>.

education, health, and human services. And in 2017, immigrants contributed \$228 billion to the City's GDP.²

Our report also highlighted ongoing demographic disparities by immigration status, including economic disparities. Although immigrant New Yorkers participate in the labor force at the same or greater rates than New York City residents born in the U.S., immigrants' median earnings are significantly lower than those of U.S.-born residents, especially for undocumented residents. The median earnings for U.S.-born residents is about \$49,000, compared to about \$26,000 for undocumented residents. Not surprisingly, undocumented immigrants have higher rates of poverty than New Yorkers more generally. According to our colleagues and partners at NYC Opportunity, the NYC Government Poverty Measure³ shows that the poverty rate was 20 percent for all New Yorkers in 2016. When accounting for immigration status this jumps to about 23 percent for immigrant New Yorkers, and about 31 percent for undocumented immigrants.

The report also helps MOIA monitor changes in disparities over time. One area of good news is in health insurance, where the gap has begun to close. Due to the Affordable Care Act and the City's efforts to expand insurance coverage, including a campaign by MOIA in 2016 to connect DACA-eligible immigrants to Medicaid, the uninsured rate for non-citizens declined by about 14 percentage points between 2012 and 2017. More work remains to be done, and MOIA is excited to be working with our partners at NYC Health + Hospitals in the roll out of NYC Care, which will help ensure that all New Yorkers have access to the health care they need.

MOIA programs and achievements

Part two of MOIA's annual report looks broadly at our key initiatives, programs and achievements. I have testified extensively about some of this work in recent hearings before this Committee. To emphasize just a few of the office's successes: MOIA has coordinated multi-agency responses to various cruel and anti-immigrant policies on the federal level, including family separation and the proposed changes to the "public charge" rule. MOIA expanded the poll site interpretation project to the largest it's ever been, sending interpreters to 101 poll sites and serving about 2,000 voters in 2018.

For immigration legal services, our report highlighted the expanded City investments in immigration legal services including removal defense, support for separated families and unaccompanied children, and expanded immigrant legal services in Chinese, Korean, and South Asian immigrant communities.

ActionNYC providers conducted over 9,500 comprehensive immigration legal screenings, an increase of about 21 percent compared to 2017, and opened over 6,200 new cases, an increase of

² NYC OMB calculations based on February 2019 Financial Plan Forecast. City GDP measures the value of the goods and services produced by the New York City economy in a given time period. Employment counts and average earnings are based on 2017 1-year ACS Public Use Microdata provided by NYC Opportunity.

³ See New York City Mayor's Office of Economic Opportunity, An Economic Profile of Immigrants in New York City (March 2019) available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/opportunity/pdf/immigrant-poverty-report-2018.pdf>. Data based on 2016 1-year American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample as augmented by the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity.

about 28 percent compared to 2017. As part of the response to family separation, the City allocated \$4.1 million to legal services for migrant children. And as part of an initiative to serve hard-to-reach immigrant communities, MOIA coordinated the training of eight community-based organizations who then were able to begin providing immigration legal services.

Distributing the report

The annual report has proved popular with stakeholders eager to use the data we provided about demographics and our programs. We held briefings for elected officials, including the Council, as well as for community groups. In addition to publishing the annual report on our website, we shared the annual report with over 80 community-based organizations over email. We also distributed over 770 physical copies of the report, including over 700 copies to community members who attended the Immigrant Heritage Week celebration at Gracie Mansion and those who attended the Nowruz event, and dozens of copies to agencies, public and private health care staff, and our library partners for NYCitizenship.

The response has been very positive. We have heard anecdotally that the annual report has been useful both for advocates and for other community members. In fact, our report has been extensively cited by multiple media outlets, including NY1 Noticias, Korea Daily, and China Press. This shows the desire for the kind of data analysis and program data that MOIA produces.

Demographic data

MOIA plays a key role in quantitative and qualitative analysis for the Mayor's Office, City agencies, and for the city at large. Central to this work has been our ability to use data to highlight the ongoing disparities and barriers that exist within our immigrant communities and that are often driven by differences in immigration status. To make these estimates, we work in close partnership with other city agencies and demographers.

Developed by the NYC Office of Economic Opportunity, and in partnership with other national researchers such as the Center for Migration Studies, the City has developed a methodology to use American Community Survey (ACS) data to estimate the City's various immigrant groups, including the undocumented population. The ACS is a national survey that the U.S. Census Bureau administers every year to 3.5 million households. It is designed to produce reliable estimates on small areas and smaller population groups covering over 35 topics such as age, employment, education, English proficiency, and place of birth, among others. The ACS makes this data available at the individual response level through the ACS Public Use Microdata Sample, which are the anonymized individualized responses to the survey questionnaire. It is this microdata that serves as the foundation for the demographic data in our annual report.

Beginning with the non-citizen population in the microdata, we make a series of assumptions, which we call "logical edits," based on characteristics of what we know of the non-citizen population, to infer legal status. Assumptions that infer status include occupations that require legal status, receipt of certain public benefits, and certain immediate relatives of U.S. citizens, among others. These assumptions help distinguish legal residents and undocumented immigrants in the survey data.

Next, in order to further validate and refine our estimates, we perform an adjustment based on recent federal immigration data, looking at actual visa and green card numbers that arrive and/or adjust status by country of origin. This step, called “country controls,” ensures that we can more accurately adjust our estimates to reflect changing immigration patterns over time as well as to better account for the diversity of New York City’s population in our estimates.

Finally, we adjust the estimates for undercount of the undocumented population by about 7.5 percent. We use undercount assumptions that are consistent with undercount rates measured by the Census Bureau over the last few decades.⁴

The ACS data is released in one-year and five-year estimates. For this year’s report, we decided to use the single year estimates in order to provide the most up-to-date snapshot of the city’s immigrant population.

NYC Opportunity’s (OEO) methodology, as described, is a result of decades’ worth of work from statisticians that has made it possible to come up with increasingly accurate ways to estimate the undocumented population in New York City. However, as with any form of estimates based on a sample, we are always subject to some error as well as some misclassification errors based on our logical edits. Additionally, because our methodology is centered around the ACS survey, our analyses are limited to the variables presented in this questionnaire.

We are incredibly proud of the work that we have done with OEO. This methodology and the data that we have produced with it have allowed us to look deeper into the needs and barriers of our immigrant populations and families than we have ever been able to before.

Program data

Given the range of the programs that MOIA oversees, MOIA collects and analyzes a wide variety of program data. This data shows our successes and the challenges remaining for us, both in terms of growth and in terms of the concrete effects that these programs have on our communities.

Choosing what information to collect is a central part of program design. For that reason, the information we collect represents the diversity of the programs that we run and the differences in the goals of those programs. For example, knowing how many IDNYC cards have been issued is extremely important, but when planning for the future it is equally important to understand why people seek out IDNYC and how they use the card. Not every data point is collected for every program, as collection of certain information can impose a burden on the people we serve. For example, the Administration’s policies and local laws actually prohibit us from asking about immigration status for most programs, and with good reason. Asking about immigration status

⁴ See Robert Warren, Democratizing Data about Undocumented Residents in the United States: Estimates and Public-use Data, 2010 to 2013, *Journal on Migration and Human Security* 305 (2014), available at <http://jmhs.cmsny.org/index.php/jmhs/article/view/38>.

when there is no need to do so can alarm immigrant New Yorkers, especially in this federal climate, and chill service uptake.

Given the limits on the types of information we collect, there are corresponding limitations in how we can analyze that data. However, it is important to note that data we collect at point of service is the starting point, not the end, of our analysis to understand the efficacy of those programs. There are other tools that we can and have used, like focus groups and surveys, to glean additional information about our programs and how they serve immigrant New Yorkers.

How we use that analysis

In addition to informing program design and outreach, data plays a critical role in bolstering our advocacy work. MOIA regularly shares research with stakeholders and other cities to help advocate and educate about the impact of federal policies on immigrant New Yorkers. For example, with the 2018 Dream Act fact sheet that we published, we were able to demonstrate this bill could have benefitted 150,000 New Yorkers in our city. With data, we are able to make our advocacy more compelling by painting a fuller story about this population – for instance that this group on average arrived here at age 11 and has lived here for 10 years or more.

This fact sheet is just one example of how our office uses data as an important advocacy tool. Other examples include our fact sheets presenting what increased immigration enforcement looks like in our city as well as what the impact of public charge could be in our city. These tools help inform our policy discussions here in the City as well as across the country.

We use both demographic and program data in designing the programs we oversee. The poll site interpretation pilot project is a good example of a program that has been deeply influenced by demographic data. That is because our analysis of where there was need for this service was heavily based on where there were eligible voters with limited English proficiency (LEP). For the November 2018 general election, MOIA analyzed the languages spoken by the greatest concentration of eligible voters with LEP by poll site and identified six languages for which we could provide assistance with additional interpretation. MOIA then identified the 101 poll sites with the highest concentrations of eligible voters with LEP.

We also often use demographic data in targeting outreach as well as producing materials for that outreach. On multiple occasions, we design and translate flyers for outreach we are doing in certain neighborhoods based on what we knew about the demographics of that area. Again, demographic data is just the starting place for this kind of work. In many cases, we will organize events meant to reach certain harder-to-reach communities, even if they are demographically smaller. For example, we held the first ever “Garifuna and Central American Town Hall” in the South Bronx, in collaboration with multiple City agencies and local community groups.

Finally, MOIA employs a mix of methods to continually evaluate our work. This includes analyzing the program data described above, and administering additional surveys, interviews with our providers, and conducting focus groups directly with our community members. These conversations with our partners in the field help supplement the story that we get from the data.



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Conclusion

MOIA's annual report is a great source of information for our partners across the city. By highlighting both MOIA successes and the challenges ahead, the report provides a picture of the work that we do every day. In coalition with our many partners across this diverse city, we will do our utmost to build a city where everyone, regardless of immigration status or place of birth, can achieve their goals for a better future.

Thank you again for calling this hearing today. I look forward to answering your questions.