

Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs Announces Launch of NYCitizenship Services

Approximately 650,000 immigrant New Yorkers are one step away from citizenship

New York – April 19, 2016 – Commissioner Nisha Agarwal of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs today announced the launch of NYCitizenship, a citywide program that provides citizenship legal services and financial counseling at 12 public library branches alongside services available at select New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) sites. As part of NYCitizenship, New Yorkers will receive free services that include appointments with a trusted attorney for help with citizenship applications, information sessions about the citizenship process and its benefits, and free and confidential financial counseling.

The launch was held at New York Public Library's Mid-Manhattan branch, one of NYCitizenship's participating library branches. The Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs was joined at the launch by Brooklyn Public Library, New York Public Library, Queens Borough Public Library, HRA, New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG), Council Member Carlos Menchaca, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, as well as Citi Community Development, Carnegie Corporation of New York, Robin Hood Foundation, and the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City, whose support makes NYCitizenship possible. NYLAG is the legal and financial service provider for NYCitizenship.

To make an appointment, New Yorkers can call 311 and say "citizenship appointment", call the NYCitizenship Hotline at 212-514-4277 or visit nyc.gov/nycitizenship. The 12 participating NYCitizenship locations include: Bronx Library Center (Fordham), Central Library (Grand Army Plaza), Central Library (Jamaica), Flushing Library, Inwood Library; Jackson Heights Library; Kings Highway Library; Mid-Manhattan Library; Mott Haven Library; New Utrecht Library (Bensonhurst); Ridgewood Library; and Sheepshead Bay Library.

NYCitizenship will also provide citizenship services to a subset of HRA's clients who stand to benefit significantly if they obtained U.S. citizenship and financial empowerment services. This will allow the program to place a targeted emphasis on reaching the most financially vulnerable New Yorkers who are eligible to naturalize.

"For cities, increasing rates of citizenship is a win-win," said **Commissioner Nisha Agarwal of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs**. "Today we deepen

our commitment to creating pathways for citizenship for all New York City immigrants. Further, the NYCitizenship model empowers New York immigrants and their families to progress socioeconomically and financially. Increasing citizenship strengthens the financial standing of immigrants and directly benefits the health and vitality of all cities. We thank NYCitizenship’s partners and supporters who are instrumental in making this progress possible.”

“The value of this initiative is that it targets New Yorkers who are facing not only financial hardship but also health barriers that make their path to self-sufficiency even more challenging,” said **NYC Department of Social Services Commissioner Steven Banks**. “By assisting immigrants through the process of naturalization, we are giving them an opportunity to improve their lives and enjoy the many benefits and protections of becoming citizens.”

“By offering naturalization services, legal assistance and financial education all in one familiar place, NYCitizenship is paving the way to countless new opportunities for our immigrant communities – from better pay to homeownership. It’s exactly what our city needs as we continue to fight against income inequality and fight for vulnerable New Yorkers,” said **Darren Bloch, executive director of the Mayor’s Fund to Advance New York City**. “We’re grateful to our longtime partners – Citi Community Development, the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Robin Hood Foundation – for supporting the expansion of this vital program to libraries citywide.”

“Citizenship offers significant economic benefits for immigrants, their households and the cities in which they live,” said **Bob Annibale, Global Director of Citi Community Development and Inclusive Finance**. “Citi is proud to partner with the City of New York to integrate financial empowerment services into the NYCitizenship program, enabling 650,000 permanent residents to build a strong financial identity alongside a new national identity.”

There are approximately 650,000 immigrants in New York City who are lawful permanent residents but have not taken the next step to become U.S. citizens. Increasing immigrant access to citizenship through NYCitizenship is a powerful tool for fighting poverty and supporting the economic empowerment and civic integration of foreign-born New Yorkers. A recent study commissioned by the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs and supported by Citi Community Development showed for the first time that cities directly benefit when they work to increase rates of naturalization. The study found that if all eligible NYC residents naturalized, the City would see a net economic benefit of \$823 million.

We at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services know that libraries are a second home to immigrants – more than 55 percent of recent immigrants use the public library at least once a week. For years, libraries nationwide have been great allies for USCIS in helping to get important immigration information to those who need it. Last year, we were proud to partner with New York libraries to establish ‘New Americans Corners’ in every library branch in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens,” said **Phyllis Coven, New York District Director for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services.**

“Our nation’s leaders must understand that the millions of immigrants in this country aren’t going anywhere, they are here to stay. I’m proud to be part of a City government that understands this - and is actively investing on immigrant New Yorkers and integrating them by providing free citizenship services and financial counseling, among other types of support.” said **Council Member Menchaca.**

“The services NYCitizenship offers will ensure that our city's immigrant communities are given the opportunity and resources necessary to pursue the American dream,” said **Council Member Daniel Dromm.** “I applaud the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs for helping our newest New Yorkers become fully integrated in society. I look forward to working with them as we continue to develop this worthy initiative.”

"Partnering with Mayor de Blasio and serving immigrant families is core to Robin Hood's mission of fighting poverty in our city," said **Veyom Bahl, senior program officer at Robin Hood.** “NYCitizenship extends the mayor and Commissioner Agarwal's strong record of providing critical services for immigrant families directly in their communities. We are honored to be joining forces with the Administration yet again through this important initiative."

"The New York Public Library has served as a welcoming beacon of opportunity for the city's immigrants for generations, offering free services such as ESOL classes, bilingual storytimes, books in a variety of languages, tech training, job search help, the city's most popular id NYC sign up centers, and more," said **NYPL President Tony Marx.** "This NYCitizenship partnership makes yet another crucial service fully accessible to our vibrant and diverse communities, and we are proud to work with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs on the project."

“With free citizenship classes, ESL programs and collections in dozens of languages, New York City’s libraries are a first stop and a trusted resource for thousands of immigrants each year,” said **Brooklyn Public Library President**

and CEO Linda Johnson. “As the city celebrates Immigrant Heritage Week, we are proud to join Mayor de Blasio in providing free citizenship services and financial counseling to immigrants setting down roots in Brooklyn.”

“Public libraries are on the front lines of fighting inequality. Queens Library has long history of providing tools that help new Americans succeed. We offer free English classes, digital literacy workshops in multiple languages and provide popular reading materials in 50 languages. We are so excited to offer library customers free qualified legal assistance and financial empowerment through NYCitizenship and to partner with the Mayor’s office to help our newest New Yorkers towards the full benefits of citizenship,” said **Dennis M. Walcott, President and CEO, Queens Library.**

"This new initiative will build on an ongoing naturalization partnership with the Queens Public Library and Brooklyn Public Library systems currently offered through the New Americans Campaign and local New York partners NALEO Educational Fund, CUNY Citizenship Now, the International Rescue Committee and Catholic Migration Services," said **Roberto Frugone, Northeast Regional Director at NALEO Educational Fund.**

“We are thrilled to partner with the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, the Human Resources Administration, and libraries throughout the City to bring this innovative program to immigrants who may be eligible for citizenship. By combining legal and financial counseling services we will be able to take them through the process safely, and prepare them to be fully engaged citizens with the financial knowledge to build productive lives – and contribute to the prosperity of the entire community,” said Beth Goldman, President & Attorney-in-Charge, **New York Legal Assistance Program.**

State Senator Jose Peralta said, “It is vital that our immigrants receive all the assistance they need in order to become naturalized, a path that will lead them to greater social and economic opportunities and a step closer to the American Dream. I want to thank Commissioner Nisha Agarwal and the public library systems for continuing this effort and helping our immigrants become American citizens.”

"The NYCitizenship program will ensure that almost 650,000 permanent residents in our City have access to resources in their neighborhoods that will help them navigate the naturalization process such as free citizenship services, legal assistance and financial counseling," said **State Senator Gustavo Rivera.** “As we

gather to celebrate Immigrant Heritage Week, I commend Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Agarwal for continuing to put forth programs that give our immigrant communities the opportunity to fully integrate into the social, civic and economic life of our City and our country.”

“Immigrant Heritage Week is a wonderful time to remember that New York has always been a city of immigrants. Today, as the immigration process becomes more and more complicated each year, programs like NYCitizenship are more valuable than ever, ensuring every immigrant in New York has access to legal and financial advice that is relevant to their specific situation. I applaud the hard work the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs does every day to ensure every New Yorker knows they're welcome here,” said **Assembly Member Dan Quart**.

As part of NYCitizenship and with the support of Citi Community Development, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs partnered with the New School Parsons Design for Social Innovation and Sustainability Lab to study and develop an innovative method of helping NYCitizenship applicants connect to financial empowerment services, so that individuals who are ready to obtain citizenship status can also achieve greater financial stability.

NYCitizenship was first announced by Mayor Bill de Blasio during the City's first-ever Citizenship Week of Action, and builds on a letter of agreement between the City of New York and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services to strengthen citizenship education and awareness efforts in New York City by establishing “New Americans Corners” in all 217 of the City's library branches.

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