



Office of
Immigrant Affairs
Nisha Agarwal
Commissioner

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Testimony of Commissioner Nisha Agarwal

NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

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

“How can the City support ethnic media to ensure that immigrant communities receive information on local matters?”

Thank you to Speaker Mark-Viverito, Chair Menchaca, and the members of the Committee on Immigration. My name is Nisha Agarwal, and I am the Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

New York City is the most diverse city in the country. New Yorkers speak over 200 languages. While this multilingual mosaic is a huge asset, it also presents a challenge for government to serve New Yorkers who are not proficient in English. Approximately 23% of all New York City residents, or 1.8 million New Yorkers, speak a language other than English at home and have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English. Communicating effectively with this population is mandated on the federal and state levels and locally with Executive Order 120, Local Law 73, and others.

Not only are government agencies bound by law to provide equal access to information and services regardless of language, the de Blasio Administration is committed to making sure that all New Yorkers who are not proficient in English have access to needed City services. Simply stated, the City should speak the language of its residents.

To implement the Mayor's vision, my office has developed a comprehensive approach to language access. We have engaged senior staff at City agencies in a sustained effort, and we have created a new, senior-level position at MOIA, the Executive Director of Language Access Initiatives, to oversee the implementation and coordination of citywide language access compliance and programming.

One component of our comprehensive vision of language access is to support agencies in outreach to limited English proficient New Yorkers with important information about the services and resources for which they may be eligible. Engaging the ethnic and community media is a key strategy in this effort.

Many people who don't speak English rely on native-language print, radio, and online news outlets for news and information about government services and resources. Many other residents—of all language abilities—turn to local, independent news outlets that focus on their neighborhoods. New York City is a remarkably rich hub of ethnic and community media, with an estimated 270 ethnic and community newspapers that have a combined readership of about 4.5 million New Yorkers,¹ as well as a number of foreign-language radio and TV broadcast outlets. The city's range of ethnic media is a crucial connector in the lives of New Yorkers. The large, mainstream newspapers and TV and radio stations simply do not have the same reach and resonance in immigrant communities as do many of the smaller local papers or neighborhood-based websites.

In recognition of the importance of ethnic and community media in reaching New Yorkers, the City government under the de Blasio Administration has increased the proportion of advertising

¹ CUNY Center for Community and Ethnic Media, *Getting the Word Out (Or Not): How and Where New York City Advertises*, <http://cdn.journalism.cuny.edu/blogs.dir/601/files/2013/03/CCEMAdvertisingReport.pdf>.

dollars spent on placements in those outlets. In FY2015, nearly 20% of City government advertising expenditures were in ethnic media, accounting for roughly \$1.1 million. This represents a higher proportion of advertising expenditures than in recent years, and indicates greater awareness among City agencies of the important benefits of engaging ethnic and community media.

For example, I would like to describe several of the Administration's recent public campaigns that have included significant ethnic and community media advertising to successfully reach their target audiences.

In 2014, my office, with support from the Young Men's Initiative, ran a public education and advertising campaign to help young immigrant New Yorkers learn about and apply for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). DACA is an important form of temporary protection from deportation and source of work authorization, among other benefits, for immigrants who came to the United States as children and meet eligibility criteria related to education and public safety. One hundred percent of the approximately \$89,000 spent on print and radio advertising was allocated to ethnic media, with 40 print ads in eight languages across 11 publications, and with 200 radio spots in three languages across four stations.

IDNYC, this City's municipal ID card program, is a prime example of a citywide campaign that focused much of the marketing and communications on immigrant communities. The approach with IDNYC included extensive engagement with ethnic and community media, including roundtables, partnerships with organizations like the Hispanic Federation, and work with outlets such as Telemundo, Univision, El Diario, and Radio Wado to create unique opportunities for New Yorkers to learn about the program. Since the program's launch last January, ethnic and community media print ad buys have so far totaled \$340,000, which comprises approximately 64% of the total print buys. IDNYC print ads have appeared in 32 publications, representing 10 languages. Among IDNYC's radio ad buys, more than 33% has been dedicated to ethnic radio stations.

Similarly, the Department of Consumer Affairs has recently been involved in two outreach and educational campaigns: the Paid Sick Leave campaign, which spent 27% of its ad dollars with ethnic media, and the Earned Income Tax Credit campaign, which spent 37% of its ad budget with ethnic media.

To continue to build on recent successes with ethnic and community media, my office has developed three key strategies:

First, we worked with the City Hall Press Office, the City Council Speaker's Office, and the CUNY School of Journalism to create a Directory of Ethnic and Community Media. The Directory is a database of more than 200 TV, radio, print, and digital news outlets covering more than 30 languages. This Directory will help City agency communications staff identify the most effective ways of reaching their intended audiences through articles, editorials, and paid and

earned media. This resource will strengthen the Administration's communications reach to all corners of the five boroughs. This Directory is also available to members of the City Council.

Second, my team has already trained the communications departments at City agencies on accessing ethnic media and the importance of making ethnic and community media ad buys to reach all New Yorkers. We will conduct follow-up trainings, starting in March 2016.

And finally, we have for the first time added categories related to ad procurement to the annual internal language access assessment that all City agencies are required to prepare. This change will allow MOIA to better monitor agency-level ethnic media ad buys in their marketing campaigns.

We look forward to working with our public-facing city agencies, the Council, and the ethnic and community media to continue to improve the City's communications with New Yorkers of all backgrounds and languages.

On a separate note, I am pleased to see that the Speaker has introduced a resolution expressing support for President Obama's immigration executive actions. The President's expansion of the existing DACA program and his creation of a new Deferred Action program for parents of U.S. citizen and lawful permanent resident children have been enjoined from implementation by a federal district court in Texas. The federal government's appeal of that injunction is currently before the Supreme Court. The DACA and DAPA programs would provide immense benefits to thousands upon thousands of New York City's immigrant residents, and to the City itself. Mayor de Blasio, together with other mayors and county executives in the Cities for Action coalition, has filed amicus briefs to support the President's executive actions at the District Court and at the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, and we will continue to express our support.