



Mayor's Office of
Immigrant Affairs
Bitta Mostofi
Commissioner

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NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

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“Oversight – LGBTQ Immigrant Youth in New York City”

Thank you to Speaker Johnson, Chairs Menchaca and Rose, and the members of the Committees on Immigration and Youth Services for convening this hearing. My name is Kavita Pawria-Sanchez and I am the Assistant Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA).

Today's hearing is about immigrant youth, an area MOIA is particularly proud to work on. In fact, our Commissioner has just returned from a week volunteering her legal services to detained immigrant youth and families in a federal detention center in Texas, which is why she is not here currently.

My testimony will provide an overview of the work MOIA has done under the leadership of Mayor de Blasio to support immigrant New Yorkers and, in particular, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer and/or questioning (LGBTQ) immigrant youth. I am very proud to report that MOIA has conducted unprecedented outreach efforts to reach and provide support to immigrant youth across the city, including by providing information about resources for LGBTQ immigrant youth.

First, I would like to briefly address Intro. 480. The de Blasio Administration has made a historic investment of more than \$30 million on immigration legal services, alongside the largest-ever investments from the City Council. In line with our broader goal of expanding access to legal services, we applaud the goal of Intro. 480 of ensuring that the City's runaway and homeless youth are connected to these services. We are particularly gratified that the bill seeks, in effect, to expand on our existing agency-based immigration legal services programming for immigrant youth through MOIA's ActionNYC in Schools program. We look forward to working with the Council to ensure that our City continues to effectively connect vulnerable immigrant populations to services and benefits.

BACKGROUND

New York City is home to approximately 3.1 million immigrants and over 150,000 are under 18. Of this number, we estimate that approximately a third are undocumented.¹ While there is no reliable data on the number of immigrant youth who identify as LGBTQ, we know that New York City has one of the largest LGBTQ populations in the country, including many teenagers and young adults. LGBTQ youth have unique needs and challenges, and we know from our work with community members and advocates that young people who identify as LGBTQ *and* lack immigration status may face even more obstacles in accessing legal and social services, greater rates of discrimination, and other unique issues related to the intersection of their immigration status and gender identity and/or sexuality.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 5-Year American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Sample (ACS PUMS) as augmented by the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity. See Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, *The State of Our Immigrant City* 14 (2018).

OUTREACH EFFORTS

MOIA has undertaken truly unprecedented outreach work to reach immigrant youth over the past several years. To provide a snapshot, just since the beginning of 2017, MOIA conducted a total of 513 know-your-rights educational presentations and workshops (KYRs) in schools and colleges, reaching 12,343 students and family members. These school-setting KYRs inform immigrant youth about their legal rights and how to access City resources such as IDNYC and ActionNYC, and they help youth connect to information about affordable housing, fraud prevention, and support for victims of discrimination—including information about gender- and sexuality-based discrimination. In addition, late last year, MOIA participated in the Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA) Summit for LGBTQ immigrants in the DOE system, including running a workshop on interactions with local law enforcement and ICE and opportunities for youth activism.

One of our largest efforts to support immigrant youth has been through our ongoing citywide work on DACA. Through this work, we have reached thousands of immigrants, both directly and through public education, and have directed them to legal services as well as other resources, including information on LGBTQ health specialists and gender- and sexuality-based discrimination help. Though DACA remains under threat from the Trump Administration, MOIA has continued to provide information via KYRs and targeted Days of Action to ensure that immigrant New Yorkers are up to date on the latest developments. Importantly, we know that DACA has represented a powerful opportunity for LGBTQ immigrant youth, many of whom have tremendously benefited from the ability to gain work authorization and health insurance, among other benefits. We have had the privilege to meet and work with incredibly talented and courageous DACA youth who have been very public about the intersectionality of their identities as both immigrant and LGBTQ New Yorkers.

MOIA has also conducted efforts and events to reach the broader LGBTQ immigrant population, including both youth and adults. For example, as part of our 2016 Immigrant Heritage Week, MOIA hosted a successful roundtable in Jackson Heights, Queens, on the needs of LGBTQ immigrants, with participation from a number of different LGBTQ community groups. And just last month, we took part in a roundtable organized in partnership with a Russian-speaking LGBTQ group, the Commission on Human Rights, the Community Affairs Unit, and ThriveNYC to discuss discrimination, homophobia and other challenges faced by Russian-speaking LGBTQ communities, including recently-arrived immigrants.

Through this outreach, we seek to build stronger relationships with immigrant communities throughout the city and support greater access and inclusion.

MOIA AND INTERAGENCY INITIATIVES

MOIA's outreach to immigrant youth about immigration legal services is most focused at their schools, as these are often safe and familiar settings for young people who may be wary of seeking services elsewhere. In the last school year, ActionNYC in Schools provided immigration legal services at 30 schools. This program has also facilitated access for immigrant youth to other necessary services and benefits.

MOIA has participated in targeted IDNYC outreach to immigrant students. Recently, we worked with IDNYC to lower the minimum eligibility age from 14 to 10, expanding access to identification for hundreds of thousands of youth. This eligibility change, paired with applicants' ability to self-designate or omit their gender on their card, provides a younger population of LGBTQ New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status, with the ability to obtain not only their first ID but also an ID that empowers them to identify themselves in the way they choose. MOIA and IDNYC have begun this school year with great energy and enthusiasm for promoting IDNYC to an even larger number of young New Yorkers.

We also know that mental health is a concern for many immigrants, and that that is especially true for LGBTQ immigrants and youth, who often experience stigma and barriers to accessing health care. MOIA has collaborated with ThriveNYC to improve outreach and messaging for immigrant communities and effectively connect them to mental health support via the NYC Well hotline.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I want to recognize the incredible collaborative efforts of MOIA's partners sitting on this panel and my colleagues across the Administration, who have been critical in the work of supporting youth and LGBTQ New Yorkers. We look forward to continuing this conversation on LGBTQ immigrant youth with the Council.