



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**

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“Preliminary Budget Hearing - Immigration”

Thank you to Speaker Johnson, 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).

My testimony today covers MOIA's mission and role in the Administration, and outlines our work over the last year.

In a year when the federal government has launched attack after attack on our immigrant communities, the City has acted as a leader in opposing and responding to these anti-immigrant actions. MOIA has coordinated the City's resistance, collaborating with our sister agencies to provide crucial information to our affected communities, to ensure immigrant access to services, and to organize interagency and inter-city advocacy.

In addition, MOIA and our partners bolstered the City's immigrant-inclusive programs and policies, looking to innovate and evolve as we move toward our vision of a city in which immigrant families live free of barriers.

I look forward to sharing an outline of the challenges of the past year, details about our achievements, and our thoughts for the future with you.

MOIA's Mission

MOIA is tasked with the broad mission of promoting the well-being of immigrant communities in New York City. Our efforts and resources are focused on three key priority areas: 1) partnering with our sister agencies to support immigrants and integrate them into the social, economic, and cultural aspects of City life; 2) ensuring that immigrants, including emerging and vulnerable populations, have access to the legal services and information they need to protect themselves and to access new opportunities; and 3) ensuring that the City's voice is heard in state, national, and international discussions about immigrant rights and immigrant integration.

MOIA's mission is a reflection of the City's commitment to a fundamental truth: New York City is the ultimate city of immigrants. We believe that immigrants are and deserve to be recognized as a part of every aspect of civic life and have opportunities to and are recognized for helping shape and build the city.

New York City is one of the most diverse cities in the world. The city depends on immigrant participation and connection in order to function. New York City is home to 3.2 million immigrants, the largest number in the City's history. Immigrants comprise about 37% of the city population and 44% of its workforce. And immigrants live across all five boroughs, though certain areas, primarily in Queens and Brooklyn and parts of the Bronx and Manhattan, have particularly high concentrations of immigrant residents.

MOIA is proud to be a part of the City's multi-agency efforts to reach and serve immigrants, even in the face of a hostile federal administration.

Challenges

The past year has been a hard one for immigrant New Yorkers and their loved ones. I now turn to the context in which MOIA is working.

The Trump Administration redoubled its bigoted attacks on immigrants, including here in New York City. In the New York City area,¹ U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has drastically increased its arrests of immigrants, including long-term U.S. residents with no criminal convictions.² Total ICE arrests increased 88% in the first full federal fiscal year (FFY) under the Trump Administration compared to the last full federal fiscal year of the Obama Administration.³ This included an over four-fold increase of arrests of individuals with no criminal convictions.⁴ These statistics demonstrate that ICE simply does not care about the human consequences of its actions. ICE agents also made arrests in and around courthouses in New York City and across the state, which could have chilling effects on immigrants' access to justice and trust in the judicial system, including by dissuading defendants, victims, and witnesses from coming to court.

The federal government also attempted to impose senseless, cruel, and hateful policies aimed at harming some of the most vulnerable people coming to our country. The Trump Administration separated families, sought to increase family detention, proposed restrictions on who could access asylum in the United States, and proposed restrictions on who is eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. While federal courts have blocked many of those policy changes, the legal challenges are ongoing. Moreover, the Trump Administration also made it harder for immigrants to act as sponsors for unaccompanied minors by instituting an information-sharing arrangement between the Office of Refugee Resettlement and ICE. This policy, which led to potential sponsors being arrested by ICE, was widely scorned and was ultimately rejected by the Congress last month as part of the federal budget deal.

Alongside these changes, the Trump Administration proposed barriers to the legal immigration process. In 2018, the Trump Administration increased the risks of filing an immigration-related application by increasing the situations in which immigrants will be placed in removal proceedings after their application is denied. This has led to the unnecessary referral of immigrants to immigration court, and is likely to exacerbate the existing immigration court backlog. The Trump Administration also proposed new changes to longstanding policy. The federal government has proposed to change the almost 20-year-old "public charge" test, which could have devastating effects on those in the U.S. who are applying for a green card. Following similar changes to the State Department's public charge test for visa applicants applying from

¹ The ICE NYC Area of Responsibility comprises the five boroughs of New York City, plus Dutchess, Nassau, Putnam, Suffolk, Sullivan, Orange, Rockland, Ulster, and Westchester counties.

² New York City Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, *Fact Sheet: ICE Enforcement in New York City* (January 2019), available at

https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/immigrants/downloads/pdf/2019_01_moia_ice_enforcement_nyc_aor.pdf.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

abroad, there has been an over 300% increase in public charge denials in the past year.⁵ While this is due to the amendments that the Trump Administration made to the Foreign Affairs Manual's public charge inadmissibility procedures, this is a harbinger of the potential impacts that this proposed rule could have for those already in the U.S. The Trump Administration has also proposed a change to what proof is accepted in fee waiver applications. The long citizenship backlog has also severely delayed the ability of immigrants to access the benefits of naturalization on a reasonable timeline.

The Trump Administration continues to threaten the status and wellbeing of immigrants with deep and longstanding ties to the U.S. While court decisions have temporarily delayed rescission of status for recipients of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and certain recipients of Temporary Protected Status (TPS), recipients of Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) will lose their status at the end of this month.

Finally, the federal government has also directly threatened New York City and other jurisdictions who share our pro-immigrant policies. The City and jurisdictions all over the U.S. recognize the common-sense principle that local governments function best when immigrants feel comfortable interacting with local government, including local law enforcement. The Trump Administration sought to restrict funding to these local governments, which led to several federal courts decisions siding with state and local governments with these common-sense policies.

Advancing the Well-Being of Immigrants in NYC

MOIA has been able to build on the successes of our previous work to bolster our immigrant-focused policies and programs, even in the face of concerted federal attacks on our immigrant communities. This work falls within three broad categories: immigrant inclusion, access to justice, and advocacy.

I will now turn to some of MOIA's achievements in the past year. These achievements show how MOIA and our partners helped connect immigrants to crucial services in times of crisis by fostering immigrant inclusion. We partnered with City agencies, elected officials, advocates, community leaders, and others to present accurate and timely information to the communities affected by federal policy changes. In conjunction with our allies across the country, MOIA also advocated against changes that harm the city and our residents.

I will start with our efforts to promote immigrant inclusion.

Immigrant Inclusion

Interagency Work

As the City's expert on immigrant communities and immigration policy, MOIA has long coordinated and supported on a broad set of issues, recognizing that the sheer diversity of immigrant New Yorkers demands an equally broad and diverse approach. In light of the

⁵ Based on Federal Fiscal Year 2017 and Federal Fiscal Year 2018 data from the U.S. Department of State. Available at <https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/legal/visa-law0/visa-statistics.html>.

increasingly hostile federal climate for immigrants, MOIA focused more than ever on strengthening our existing framework for collaboration with City agencies.

In 2018, as part of MOIA's work and as outlined in Local Law 186 of 2017, MOIA formally convened an interagency task force on issues related to immigrants. In 2018, MOIA hosted two meetings of the inaugural Interagency Immigrant Task Force. The discussion was focused on immigrant needs and barriers to access for City services, the possible impact of federal and state developments, and sharing data and best practices. The Task Force provides us with a valuable venue to listen to agencies on how we can better support their work and learn from each other.

MOIA also coordinates closely with sister agencies on a regular basis outside of the task force, including day-to-day work we do together to ensure access to public health, housing, economic empowerment and workers' rights, and language access. This includes working with agencies to implement the requirements of Local Law 30 of 2017 on language access. MOIA also tracks compliance with Local Law 228 of 2017, which prohibits the use of City resources to support immigration enforcement, by monitoring and collecting information about any requests from non-local law enforcement agencies related to immigration enforcement.

In preparation for the 2020 Census, as part of work led by the Law Department, MOIA joined our interagency partners, including Deputy Mayor Thompson's 2020 Census team, the Department of City Planning, CAU, and the City's Law Department to fight the addition of the citizenship question to the 2020 Census. The City joined a multi-state, multi-city lawsuit against the citizenship question and supported the lawsuit by describing why the inclusion of the citizenship question is problematic. MOIA also delivered timely and accurate information about the 2020 Census by participating in community and ethnic media roundtables as well as other public events. And in the coming months I will be helping to recommend statewide efforts as an appointee to the bipartisan New York State Complete Count Commission.

Similarly, when the Trump Administration's implemented its inhumane family separation crisis, MOIA and our sister agencies responded quickly, relying on preexisting infrastructure where necessary to offer a range of health, legal, and child welfare services to affected children. In addition, everyday New Yorkers provided many generous donations, helping to fulfill the requests we received from providers. Through interagency collaboration, we were able to swiftly and appropriately provide support to the children and their families. Moreover, with the support of the Mayor's Fund, MOIA coordinated a City volunteer group consisting of employees from eight different agencies to travel to Dilley, Texas in September to work with the Dilley Pro Bono Project. I was a part of that group and was proud to play a role to prepare mothers and children for credible fear interviews in support of their asylum applications.

In 2018, the proposed change to the long-standing "public charge" rule created widespread fear and confusion in our immigrant communities. MOIA's efforts with other agencies, including Department of Social Services (DSS)/Human Resources Administration (HRA) and NYC Health + Hospitals, focused on counteracting harmful misinformation with clear and trustworthy messaging, which we distributed through trusted stakeholders and also directly to affected individuals. By collaborating across agencies and with our partners in the community, the City

delivered information to tens of thousands of New Yorkers and helped drive nearly 1,000 New Yorkers to submit comments through the MOIA and C4A websites alone. We submitted two public comments opposing the proposed rule, one on behalf of the City and another in conjunction with a coalition of cities across the country.

IDNYC

IDNYC, New York City's municipal ID card, serves as a major access point for immigrants looking to connect with the City. Through IDNYC, all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status, can obtain official, government-issued identification that can be used to access City services and City buildings, sign up for free memberships at museums and cultural institutions, and more. Approaching its fourth anniversary in 2018, IDNYC further expanded eligibility for the card and made it easier for New Yorkers to apply. As of the end of 2018, IDNYC had issued over 1.3 million cards.

MOIA worked to make the card more accessible and useful for all New Yorkers, focusing specifically on reaching new populations:

- In August, the program lowered its age eligibility from 14, allowing youth ages 10 to 13 to enroll and take advantage of the card's many benefits.
- Also in August, IDNYC announced its ability to utilize existing records from several City agencies in order to verify residency and identity information for some applicants who otherwise may not have sufficient documentation to apply. This helps simplify IDNYC applications for New Yorkers who are clients of a host of City agencies, namely, the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), HRA, the Department of Finance, and the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA).
- IDNYC also continued its successful use of temporary "pop-up" enrollment centers across the City. In 2018, IDNYC enrolled a total of 9,761 New Yorkers at over 60 pop-up sites.
- Finally, just a few weeks ago, IDNYC changed its application system to allow cardholders to identify their gender as "X" if they desire.

As IDNYC moves toward its first renewal period in January 2020, we have begun to look at ways to increase utilization of the card for New Yorkers with increased integrations and an exploration of the possibility of adding a payment and banking feature on a "smart chip" on the IDNYC card. We look forward to hearing more from New Yorkers on how we can best increase access as the program continues to build for the future.

Language Access

Facilitating language access is one of the fundamental building blocks for connecting immigrant New Yorkers to the services they need, and is also a tool for empowering immigrants to engage in the political process.

Building on work MOIA had done with the City Council, MOIA expanded access to voting for LEP voters in 2017 through increased interpretation services at poll sites. Through analysis of Census data, MOIA identified the top languages for which the Board of Elections does not provide interpretation and the poll sites with the highest concentrations of voter-eligible LEP

New Yorkers that speak these languages. MOIA piloted the poll site interpretation project for the November 2018 general election and February 2019 special election for Public Advocate. MOIA coordinated interpreters contracted by a third party organization who were placed at poll sites during these elections. Recognizing the value of these services, New York City voters overwhelmingly approved a proposal from the NYC Charter Revision Commission to establish a Civic Engagement Commission whose mission includes institutionalizing this work to expand language access at poll sites.

MOIA also provided technical assistance to agencies in implementing the City's language access law, Local Law 30 (LL 30) of 2017, the most expansive language access law in the nation. In 2018, MOIA worked with over 30 agencies to develop their language access implementation plans, which outline how agencies will advance language access; held more than 20 one-on-one meetings with agencies to discuss LL 30 implementation; provided regular technical assistance on language access to agencies; coordinated two convenings with agency language access coordinators on LL 30 and the steps agencies can take to improve translations; and collaborated with the Mayor's Office of Operations to submit the first annual report about language access to the City Council.

We Speak NYC

MOIA also supports and supplements existing literacy programs through our Emmy-nominated We Speak NYC program. We Speak helps immigrant New Yorkers learn English and practice conversation skills through content-based, civic-focused instruction, videos, and education materials.

Last year, the City invested over \$3 million in the launch of a new season and additional learning tools for We Speak. The second season featured seven new episodes that address topics such as mental health, workers' rights, social services, workforce development, and early childhood education. We Speak increased the number of classes offered by nearly 50% from 2017 to 2018, reaching more than 5,000 students. The program also launched an updated online platform, to help New Yorkers learn on their own time and at their own pace. We Speak has developed nearly 100 quizzes and interactive activities that learners can access on the online platform to engage in self-study, and are in the process of creating additional supplemental resources that include conversation activity plans and supporting curriculum designed around the civic-focused content from the second season. These materials are created to further support ESOL educators and facilitators in classrooms. I am also very pleased to say that We Speak last month was nominated for two New York Emmy Award in the categories of information/instructional productions and photography. As this fiscal year comes to a close, we are in the process of incorporating the new season's episodes and lessons in our community conversation classes. We will also be leading workshops in partnership with the Regional Adult Education Network to promote skills and information from the We Speak NYC curriculum, including interviewing skills, resume building, and workers' rights.

NYC Immigrant Information Desk

Innovating on existing methods of providing information and referrals to immigrants who need help, in 2017 MOIA and the Council partnered with service providers to launch the NYC

Immigrant Information Desk. The NYC Immigrant Information Desk serves as an “in-person 311” supporting immigrant and LEP families in navigating City services and other needs. City Service Navigators work out of three locations: Metropolitan Hospital in East Harlem, the Coney Island SNAP Center, and the Queens Public Library in Flushing. In 2018, MOIA continued this work, and the three sites have shared information with over 12,000 people, and referred over 3,000 people for services.

Outreach and Community Services

As a trusted voice in immigrant communities, MOIA’s Outreach and Community Services teams help to create and coordinate community events where we share crucial and timely information in a variety of settings across New York City. Through these teams, MOIA is able to engage a host of different communities in culturally appropriate and linguistically diverse ways. In 2018, MOIA helped lead events with Russian LGBTQIA+ communities, a celebration of Diwali during Brooklyn Borough Hall, and the third annual Iftar in the City, which brought together over 600 members of diverse faith communities from the Jackson Heights area. MOIA also collaborates with our sister agencies to activate volunteers: in 2018, over 300 volunteers conducted targeted outreach and days of visibility in response to recent changes immigration policy and bias and anti-immigrant incidents and campaigns.

MOIA’s outreach staff saw great success in building the capacity of immigrant-serving CBOs in a time when federal policies are rapidly changing. For example, our team worked closely with community providers, faith leaders, and other community groups to share information about the proposed rule on “public charge” inadmissibility, empowering those providers to better serve and organize their members.

The Community Services team has seen firsthand the effects of an increasingly hostile federal environment. Our team has seen an increase in requests for assistance and advocacy on time sensitive immigration cases, where we connected individuals to legal supports where appropriate and worked with our federal partners to provide additional advocacy where needed. There was a significant increase in calls to our hotline around changes in immigration policy, including the updated travel ban announcement in the earlier part of the year, DACA renewal deadline in March and the advent of the family separation policy in May at the border. Overall we have seen an increase in inquiries related to the family separation crisis as well as requests for legal assistance for those who are detained or under order of deportation. In 2018, the Community Services team responded to 504 calls through our hotline and 311, and provided 657 referrals. MOIA also received 332 e-mails and provided 165 referrals via e-mail.

To provide just one example: MOIA provided crucial constituent-services support to a U.S. citizen father and longtime New York City resident who had filed an immigrant visa petition for his daughter to come to the U.S. to live with him and her sister. Her sister suffered from a serious health condition and she was a perfect bone marrow match. After she was initially denied a visa by the consulate, erroneously on public charge grounds, MOIA worked with New York Legal Assistance Group’s LegalHealth team and others to bring the case to the attention of Senator Kirsten Gillibrand’s office. I am happy to report that the decision was reversed and that she was

able to secure an immigrant visa and travel to the United States to join her family here. Her sister is now preparing to receive a lifesaving transplant.

Access to Justice

With the increase in enforcement against our immigrant families, neighbors, and friends, the City has invested in high-quality, trusted immigrant legal services and provided information about rights as a way to defend our immigrant communities.

Together, the de Blasio Administration and the City Council have invested historic amounts in immigration legal services. In FY2019, New York City invested approximately \$48 million in a continuum of free legal services programs for immigrant New Yorkers, including \$22.1 million for Immigrant Opportunity Initiatives (IOI), which in turn gives the City flexibility to respond quickly to the ever-shifting federal landscape. As just one example, the City recently allocated \$4.1 million to provide legal services to migrant children and their families in response to the family separation crisis. In addition, MOIA has partnered with the Robin Hood Foundation and community-based organizations to deliver relevant information to immigrant New Yorkers. This effort allows MOIA to partner with trusted community-based organizations to deliver important information directly to immigrant communities.

Immigration legal services have always been a tool of empowerment for immigrant New Yorkers and their families. The City's free, safe legal services combat immigration fraud, and are critical in our citywide effort to empower immigrants in the face of attempts to disenfranchise them. In the past year, MOIA continued to work with the Human Resource Administration's Office of Civil Justice (OCJ), to expand the City's investments in immigration legal services including removal defense, support for separated families and unaccompanied children, and expanding immigrant legal services in Chinese, Korean, and South Asian immigrant communities.

ActionNYC

ActionNYC is a citywide, community-based immigration legal services program that provides access to immigration legal services and resources to grow the immigration legal services field. Through its citywide hotline, centralized appointment-making system, and accessible service locations at CBOs, schools, and hospitals, ActionNYC serves as the entry point for New Yorkers seeking immigration legal services. Recognizing that immigrant New Yorkers already interact with the City in a variety of settings, ActionNYC partners with providers in CBOs, NYC Health + Hospitals locations, and schools. In the past year, recognizing the urgent need for legal services in certain hard-to-reach and growing immigrant populations, ActionNYC expanded to serve even more high-need populations in their neighborhoods and in their language.

In total, ActionNYC providers conducted over 9,500 comprehensive immigration legal screenings in 2018F, an increase of about 21% compared to 2017, and opened over 6,200 new cases, an increase of about 28% compared to 2017.

ActionNYC also increases local providers' capacity to provide high-quality immigration legal services. Launched in 2017, the ActionNYC Capacity Building Fellowship has provided comprehensive training and technical assistance to develop the capacity of 18 small and

medium-sized community organizations to deliver immigration legal services and conduct outreach. After a year of rigorous training as part of the fellowship's legal component, 8 CBOs expanded to conducting comprehensive immigration legal screenings and providing full legal representation in straightforward immigration matters. In addition, all ActionNYC sites and community navigators receive support to obtain and maintain U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Recognition, meaning the organization has permission from DOJ to practice immigration law through Accredited Representatives before federal authorities. DOJ Accreditation also enables them to represent clients before USCIS.

NYCitizenship

Launched in April 2016, NYCitizenship provides free citizenship application assistance, including screenings and full legal representation, as well as financial empowerment services to immigrant New Yorkers. MOIA operates NYCitizenship in partnership with the Brooklyn, Queens, and New York Public Library systems, DSS/HRA, New York Legal Assistance Group, and the Mayor's Fund to Advance NYC. The program is supported by the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity alongside private funders including the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Citi Community Development, the Charles H. Revson Foundation, and the Robin Hood Foundation.

In 2018, MOIA expanded NYCitizenship by adopting the community navigator model increasing the program's capacity to serve individuals seeking naturalization. NYCitizenship provided services at 12 public library branches across the five boroughs. Through a partnership with DSS/HRA, the program also offered services to vulnerable populations, including seniors and those facing health barriers such as disability. In 2018, NYCitizenship reached 10,823 individuals. The program screened 1,906 clients and filed 978 citizenship applications. If eligible, individuals also received assistance with fee waiver and disability waiver applications. Additionally, clients were connected to free and confidential financial counseling.

KYR Forums

In partnership with the Robin Hood Foundation, MOIA has also been coordinating closely with community-based organizations to deliver Know Your Rights information to immigrant New Yorkers.

KYR content delivered in the first half of 2018 included: updates on recent federal immigration policy changes such as DACA, TPS and the Travel Ban; best practices for interacting with federal immigration agents in public and private spaces; how to avoid immigration scams and access free legal services; and how to access city resources regardless of immigration status. In 2018 as part of that grant, we completed a total of 325 KYRs, 175 of which were held in schools, reaching 9,430 individuals.

Following the first year of the Robin Hood grant which ended in June 2018, MOIA partnered with Robin Hood again to build a KYR program targeting low-wage immigrant workers. Starting in November 2018, our partners inform communities about their rights as workers in New York City, best practices for interacting with federal immigration agents in the workplace, how to avoid immigration scams and access free worker and immigration legal services, completing 16

KYR events over two months and reaching 177 people. In January 2019, MOIA launched a new series of KYRs. These KYRs are on general immigrants' rights and take place in schools and communities.

Advocacy

An important piece of MOIA's work is ensuring that the City's voice is heard on issues at all levels of government. MOIA has monitored immigration-related developments and conducted advocacy on the local, state, federal, and international levels to support pro-immigrant policies and protect immigrant New Yorkers' rights, including through the provision of timely, accurate, and reliable information to stakeholders.

Federal Advocacy and Litigation

MOIA and our partners across the city and country were involved in advocacy on every major federal immigration policy development in 2018.

In advocating against anti-immigrant federal policies, MOIA used a variety of tactics and tools to maximize our impact. For example, in providing context for why the federal DREAM Act would be so important to cities, I traveled to Washington, D.C. to meet with Members of Congress to share the impact of the DREAM Act on New York City, using research MOIA had developed as a starting point for those discussions. This is something I have done multiple times, for multiple issues. MOIA also served to coordinate the City's response to the proposed "public charge" rule, working with DSS, NYC Health + Hospitals, and other agencies. Our advocacy around the proposal included meeting with federal officials to explain why the proposed rule would require additional economic analysis given the scope of its anticipated effect on New York City, supporting other cities and states who were also conducting similar meetings, and coordinating two comments from the City submitted in December 2018. Similarly, as part of our response to the family separation crisis, MOIA led the City's participation in a multi-city comment opposing the proposed regulations amending the Flores agreement, under which children accompanied by parents cannot be held in detention for more than 20 days.

The City has also used the power of the courts to combat the Trump Administration's anti-immigrant policies. In recognition that the whole City is safer when immigrant residents feel comfortable accessing City services and reporting crimes, the City joined a multi-city, multi-state lawsuit that successfully challenged the Trump Administration's efforts to condition federal grants on collaboration with federal immigration authorities. New York City has joined or supported as amicus in a number of other crucial immigrant rights cases, providing courts with the local government perspective on issues such as how local pro-immigrant policies support efforts to promote the public safety, health, and welfare of all of our residents; why citizenship status should not be included as a question in the 2020 decennial Census; and the local interests impacted due to the family separation crisis; the travel ban; the future of DACA; and determinations to end TPS for different countries.

Finally, MOIA joins with our partners across the nation in the Cities for Action (C4A) coalition to amplify the voices of local governments. Through this coalition, we have focused on providing accurate information to other cities and community leaders and sharing best practices.

The coalition strongly condemned a range of anti-American policies, including the travel ban, refugee admissions, TPS, DACA, family separation, and public charge.

Looking Forward to FY 2020

Our efforts will steadfastly continue to ensure that immigrants are included in every aspect of the City's work, by creating new and innovative programs and by evolving and institutionalizing the programs we currently have. We envision three areas of particular focus in the coming year: increasing access to City services, informing and engaging the immigrant community so that all New Yorkers are empowered to exercise their rights, and advocating for the removal of barriers to achievement for immigrant New Yorkers.

Increasing Access

In FY2020, MOIA will expand its work to increase cultural and linguistic competencies in the delivery of critical services and benefits across city agencies and within immigrant communities. As we prepare for the possibility of federal barriers to access to crucial public benefits, MOIA will work with our sister agencies and our community partners to build on our language access services, outreach efforts, Know Your Rights programming, and the NYC Immigrant Information Desk to more efficiently and effectively connect New Yorkers to services.

MOIA will also build on its successes with our legal services programs to ensure that we build on those programs in a way that provides for greater efficiency and stability, and ensure the program's lasting legacy in bringing free and confidential immigration legal help to immigrant New Yorkers in their community and in their language. Toward that end, MOIA, in partnership with DSS/HRA, will release a concept paper that serves as a precursor to a forthcoming Request for Proposal for ActionNYC, with the goal of providing services under a new structure in July 2020.

Finally, MOIA will work with our partners at NYC Health + Hospitals as the City implements the Mayor's new NYC Care program. The City is committed to providing access to health coverage for all uninsured New Yorkers, regardless of status. MOIA has long been involved in ensuring that immigrants have access to the health care they need, and MOIA and the City are dedicated to dismantling the barriers to making this a reality through NYC Care.

Inform and Engage

In the face of increased risk of arrest and deportation, MOIA will work in FY2020 to strengthen immigrant community protections against deportation by effectively connecting individuals to legal services and rights education. Providing legal services and pathways to citizenship to protect immigrants will help mitigate the harms of increasingly aggressive immigration enforcement.

As a way of closing the economic gap, MOIA is also fighting against unscrupulous individuals who would prey on fearful immigrants in this time of crisis. By providing resources for immigrants at risk of fraud and providing rights education, MOIA will advance economic justice for vulnerable immigrant New Yorkers.

All New Yorkers – regardless of immigration status – play a critical role in our City's future. MOIA will work to expand our democracy to encourage all New Yorkers to participate in our civic life. MOIA will accomplish this through increased community town halls and cultural celebrations that provide every New Yorker more opportunities to engage with the City. Additionally, MOIA will continue to expand poll-site interpretation services so that every citizen can have full access to vote regardless of language ability. These actions will strengthen our democracy and ensure that the City can be responsive to all New Yorkers.

Advocacy

In FY2020, the City will use all means at its disposal to defend our residents against anti-immigrant policies imposed and proposed by the federal government and advocate for common-sense, pro-immigrant policies at the state and national level. We are committed to ensuring the safety and security of all New Yorkers, especially in their interactions with the City. In coalition with and across our sister agencies, MOIA will work to better serve immigrants and realize greater equity and fairness for all.

Conclusion

MOIA's vision of New York City is one in which all immigrants and their families can thrive. New York City is strongest when its immigrant communities are empowered to participate in civic life, and where the government and the people we serve grow together. In collaboration with this City Council and other partners, we can strive toward the realization of that vision.

I want to thank this Committee and the entire City Council for being a crucial partner in the fight to advance the well-being of immigrants in New York City. I also want to thank the many community-based organizations and service providers whom we work with day in and day out. MOIA will continue to listen to immigrant New Yorkers, monitor and understand the impacts of anti-immigrant policies, and work towards making New York City a city for our immigrant communities to flourish.