



TESTIMONY

New York City Council Committee of the Whole

“Oversight - Examining the City’s Response and Delivery of Services to Migrants”

December 20, 2022

Submitted by: Human Services Council (HSC)

Introduction

We urge the City of New York to transform its approach to the 30,000+ people seeking asylum and other refuge in NYC, and to more equitably prepare for anticipated new arrivals. This calls for a shift from reactive initiatives towards meaningful investment in an exhausted human services infrastructure.

HSC is a membership organization representing 170 nonprofit human services providers in NYC, serving as a coordinating body, advocate, and intermediary between the human services sector and government. Our testimony follows consultations with 80+ human services providers representing community-based, citywide, statewide, and national nonprofits serving people seeking asylum and other reasons for migration.

These providers report acute needs for safe housing, food, clothing, and medical treatment. Clients need immediate and long-term care coordination, legal services, employment, affordable housing, healthcare, childcare, skills training, and language learning, among other services. Communities include older adults, young children, people of the global majority (non-white), LGBTQ/TGNC+ people, people with disabilities, non-English speakers, and more. Many navigate the complex traumas of unfathomable struggles to leave home, followed by racist forced migration within the U.S. that violate humans by “shipping” them interstate. Some face long roads ahead in aspiring for a new home, with providers projecting 5+ years of needs based on legal processing alone.

Many providers have programs tailored towards social services or geographic/identity-based communities in NYC that correspond with the many communities *within* newly migrating communities. These providers showed up to meet the rapid new needs in 2022, despite a lack of much-needed resources. Among the human services providers consulted by HSC in November and December 2022:

- 96% reported providing services to people seeking asylum entirely or partially out of pocket, extending existing funding and staffing to their best ability, despite being uncertain about possible reimbursement.
- 40% reported that a government entity asked them to provide services for people seeking asylum (predominantly Mayoral offices and City agencies). Less than 13% said that complete governmental funding was offered for these partnerships (with 80% of funds offered as reimbursements).
- Other providers reported that they would provide services if they had the funding or staffing.

Providers are over capacity and straining to meet existing needs, especially after prior enforcement policies, concurrent COVID-19 recovery, and overall migration trends.ⁱ And yet, human services organizations continue to help the City try to meet the reputation it boasts: a sanctuary for oppressed people here and abroad.

Advocacy

Cross-Cutting

1. **Create a dedicated, expedited funding stream for comprehensive human services, with funding amount and focus determined in partnership with human services organizations** (\$25 million in emergency funding at minimum).ⁱⁱ
 - Following the announcement of a State of Emergency, leverage dedicated emergency procurement models from past crises (e.g., COVID-19), ensuring that the first round of funding is accompanied by a multi-year plan for fund renewals and is accessible to community-based organizations.ⁱⁱⁱ

- Improve transparency by disclosing all coordination and spending in the City’s response to date, including all funded and unfunded coordination with organizations (recipients, amounts, and durations of funding) across Mayoral offices and City agencies.
 - Ensure that the full costs of services are paid to organizations (not only salaries), including just compensation, mental health support, coverage for accessibility tools, and other resources.^{iv}
2. **Design and resource a public education campaign for New Yorkers to better understand the situation faced by their newest neighbors, mitigate stigma/discrimination, and galvanize resources for families.**
- Compassionately and respectfully humanize this effort, sharing the stories that underline the deep risk that families took to get here, and the stigma now being experienced (especially by children).
 - Partner with community and faith-based organizations, and City entities like the NYC Commission on Human Rights, to thoughtfully implement and advise the campaign to avoid tokenizing clients.

Care Coordination

3. **Significantly expand resources for care coordination and sustained case management, especially with community-based organizations providing these services (often without funding).**
- Create a more comprehensive service directory for people seeking asylum, in different languages (especially in indigenous languages), for use by care coordinators and their clients.
 - Fund more care coordination programs to: hire more navigators/case managers and extend their employment; provide more comprehensive training across navigators and navigation sites; and supply families with what they need to access referred resources (e.g., phones, transportation support).
 - Expand navigation sites in more communities beyond the [current 10 sites](#), working with community-based providers to host and/or locate additional sites.
 - Design data collection and management infrastructure that can be centralized and used across programs, prioritizing very strong protections for clients who fear that inclusion in care coordination may result in enforcement (e.g., allowing for anonymized entries).^v
 - Advocate to the State for a sustained food assistance program, assessing what has been done in other jurisdictions (e.g., California).

Employment, Training, and Education

4. **Coordinate with State and Federal governments for more accessible and rapid employment, education, and licensing pathways.**
- Demand that the Federal government expedite Employment Authorization Document processes.
 - Ensure that NY State expands access to their Licensing Act regardless of immigration status.
 - Expand dedicated resources for sustained and accessible workforce development trainings, including interpretation support and donated technology (e.g., laptops, tablets, phones) pre-loaded with information on these processes.
 - Eliminate caps on street vending licenses/permits to provide opportunities for newly arrived immigrant entrepreneurs, and remove the NYPD from enforcement of street vendors.^{vi}
 - Ensure access to childcare for all newly arrived families, funding community and faith-based organizations to do tailored outreach.^{vii}
 - Create pathways for people seeking asylum to find employment opportunities with human services organizations, which will rely on the expedited authorizations referenced above.

Health

5. Ensure financially, culturally, and linguistically accessible healthcare for all people seeking asylum and other reasons for migration, regardless of immigration and/or employment status.

- Elevate existing advocacy efforts for Medicaid for all regardless of immigration status, and expand educational campaigns for organizations on Medicaid qualification.
- Increase funding for Access Health NYC community-based organizations, who provide culturally responsive critical resources and services, including connecting individuals to health coverage and care.^{viii}
- Expand human services organizations' access to trauma-informed medical professionals, counselors, and social workers offering appropriate mental health care.^{ix}
- Organize mobile vaccination clinics to provide free immunizations at all service sites.^x

Housing

6. Remove any barriers to shelter, transitional, and long-term affordable housing.

- Expedite extremely slow shelter, public housing, and rental assistance processes in agencies facing bureaucratic issues with backlogs of hundreds of applications, providing them with adequate resources.
- Notably, make CityFHEPS accessible to all New Yorkers regardless of immigration status, fill vacancies in CHIP apartments, and address Sources of Income discrimination.^{xi}
- Secure resources for staffing to human services organizations offering housing, ideally hiring staff from communities.

Legal

7. Work with legal services providers to accurately identify funding for emergency, triaged legal needs (\$10 million in emergency funds at minimum),^{xii} and designate an additional multi-year fund for continued legal representation.^{xiii}

- Resources should include training campaigns and legal packets for all clients and their advocates (including lawyers, DOJ representatives, SIJS, case managers, shelter employees, etc.) on rights, processes, benefits, and more; coverage of legal fees; and long-term representation.
- Resources should also support advocacy for federal policy reform, e.g., executive orders to extend the timeframe to submit applications for asylum.

Conclusion

NYC has long expressed pride in its identity as a sanctuary city. But the City is struggling to prioritize its rich resources and relationships towards a well-coordinated, equitable, community-driven, and sustainable welcome for our newest neighbors. NYC has the infrastructure within the human services sector to fully address needs. But this can only happen when the sector is seen as an equal partner, and is funded as one by the City, State, and Federal government. We have the opportunity to show that the concept of a sanctuary city is more than a tagline on a fading billboard. Meaningfully invest in human services infrastructure now to fill the gaps that have already left thousands in the dark as they enter their first winter in NYC.

Contact

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ⁱ Source: Immigrant Advocates Response Collaborative (I-ARC); HSC, "[Essential or Expendable? How Human Services Supported Communities Through COVID-19 and Recommendations to Support an Equitable Recovery.](#)"

ⁱⁱ Sources: I-ARC and New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC)'s [Welcoming New York Campaign](#); based also on current and projected total costs of these City services in the "Impact of Newly Arrived Asylum Seekers on New York City's Budget" Memo released November 13, 2022 by George V. Sweeting, Acting Director of the City of New York Independent Budget Office.

ⁱⁱⁱ NYC made an emergency procurement declaration on August 1, 2022 to bypass usual procurement processes to expedite contracting of services to support asylees. Source: "Declaration of Emergency for Asylee Services and Shelter," Commissioner Gary Jenkins, NYC DSS.

^{iv} See more on just pay for human services workers in the HSC’s [Just Pay Campaign](#).

^v Design equitable and protected data sharing models based on best practices of other jurisdictions, notably the [model used in El Paso](#).

^{vi} Source: NYIC’s [Welcoming New York Campaign](#).

^{vii} Source: NYIC’s [Welcoming New York Campaign](#).

^{viii} See NYIC’s Welcoming [New York Campaign](#) for more details.

^{ix} See NYIC’s Welcoming [New York Campaign](#) for more details.

^x See NYIC’s Welcoming [New York Campaign](#) for more details.

^{xi} Source: NYIC’s [Welcoming New York Campaign](#).

^{xii} Sources: I-ARC and NYIC’s [Welcoming New York Campaign](#); based also on current and projected total costs of City services in “Impact of Newly Arrived Asylum Seekers on New York City’s Budget” Memo released November 13, 2022 by George V. Sweeting, Acting Director of the City of New York Independent Budget Office.

^{xiii} Sources: I-ARC and NYIC’s [Welcoming New York Campaign](#).