



TESTIMONY

NYC Council Committee on Immigration, Jointly with the Committee on Governmental Operations “[Oversight – Meeting the Needs of Asylum Seekers in NYC](#)”

April 28, 2023

Submitted by: Human Services Council of New York (HSC)

RESPONSE TO PROPOSED LOCAL LAWS AND RESOLUTIONS

The Council’s proposed local laws and resolutions to better serve people seeking asylum in NYC are encouraging. However, these proposals require dedicated funding and community partnerships for effective implementation. We urge the City to invest in long-term, community-driven human services.

As outlined in past testimonies, these include multi-year investments in legal services, housing, care coordination, health services, and more offered by an exhausted human services infrastructure. HSC has witnessed the impact on that infrastructure as a membership organization of 170 nonprofit human services providers in NYC.

Broadly, the proposed local laws have the potential to meet some needs outlined in past testimonies by HSC and our partners. However, ongoing challenges in funding and partnering with community organizations are concerning, and this must be concurrently addressed for the proposals to meet the needs of people seeking asylum. We recommend that:

- For Int 0909-2023 and Int 0790-2022 to enhance the IDNYC application process: Additionally address capacity issues with administering this service (which cause significant delays and other barriers), including by exploring expanded capacity via funded partnerships with community organizations.
- For Int 0839-2022 for an Office of Refugee and Migrant Settlement: Commit to designing and operating it in shared power with community organizations via equitable investment in long-term human services.
- For Int. 0569-2022 for an immigrant workers’ bill of rights: Resource community organizations and collectives focused on workforce development and labor rights to design and distribute the bill of rights.

The proposed resolutions also have potential to broadly meet the needs of past testimonies, such as: *Res 0556-2023*, Access to Representation Act, establishing rights to legal counsel in immigration court; and *Res 0307-2022*, *Res 0459-2023*, and *T2023-3436* removing some employment authorization status barriers (clearing the backlog, lessening employer abuses, and extending access to work pre-authorization to migrants from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela). We recommend that:

- For Res 0532-2023 and Res 0365-2022 calling for federal and state resources for people seeking asylum: Center multi-year investment in community human services in the request/deployment of resources.
- For Res 0364-2022, Children’s Safe Welcome Act of 2022: Ensure significant expansion of access to guardians for unaccompanied minors.
- For Res 0381-2022 condemning the human trafficking of migrants: Accompany this resolution with a funded public education campaign in partnership with community organizations, for New Yorkers to better understand their newest neighbors, mitigate stigma/discrimination, and galvanize resources.

Partners identified that the primary gap in these proposals regarded significantly expanded urgent and long-term funding for legal services and mental health services. Providers struggle to refer people seeking asylum to pro-bono legal representation and sustained mental health support. It is unclear if the proposals will address these issues, but it must be prioritized in requests for additional resources. Also, several proposals hinge on the capacity for City agencies and Mayoral offices to execute, but we are concerned with the City’s challenges to hire and maintain talent to provide human services after its recent poor track record and ongoing vacancies.

SUPPORTING FINDINGS

HSC has engaged over 80 human services providers and 200 workers from community-based, citywide, and national organizations. In a January 2023 [report](#) by HSC, providers saw service to people seeking asylum as a natural extension of their mission. They offered critical care to communities that were: 86% non-English/ESL speakers; 75% low-income; 68% under/unemployed; 58% unstably housed/un-housed; >50% older adults, youth, or parents with infants; and 47% seeking mental health support. **Most human services organizations served people seeking asylum on their own initiative, using their own funds, and their own networks:**

- 96% provided services entirely or partially out of pocket, extending resources without known reimbursement.
- 40% were asked by government to provide services, but <13% were offered complete funding for that service.
- 17% reporting that challenges to scaling up were due to pre-existing unpaid contract work with government.
- 29% worked with governmental service hubs, but most mentioned hubs intentionally/organically formed around local nonprofits, congregations, businesses, or mutual aid groups.

The City that prides itself on being a sanctuary still struggles to equitably share resources with community leaders and providers who make that sanctuary possible. Many organizations are concerned that they will be unable to sustain services in the under-resourced landscape navigated to-date. Findings reflect a wider trend in a sector facing forced cuts and [closures](#) of critical human services programs after long-term systemic inequities in resource distribution in NYC—such as [government-sanctioned poverty wages](#) and delayed payment.

RELATED ADVOCACY

People seeking sanctuary in NYC should receive compassionate, dignified, and continuous services while fighting to recover from the traumas of unfathomable journeys to the U.S. and forced migration within the country. Many face long roads ahead in aspiring for a new home. The Executive Budget shows us who City leadership values, and currently it does not include everyday New Yorkers and the human services organizations serving them. Budget rhetoric from the highest offices of NYC government also continue to blame people who seek asylum and other refuge for often pre-existing City issues—fanning xenophobia and other forms of hatred in NYC.

The City must codify genuine partnerships with community-based organizations advocating for and working with migrating communities into all proposed legislation and resolutions. Additional advocacy is needed to:

- Reform the City Executive Budget (and any budget related to the above proposals) to prioritize direct, sustained funding for comprehensive human services developed by and for community organizations.ⁱ

- Leverage emergency procurement models for community partners from past crises (e.g., COVID-19), and secure multi-year fund renewals accessible to community-based organizations.ⁱⁱ
- Pay the full cost of services to organizations (not only salaries), prioritize just pay, and allow for flexible deliverables and upfront payment to encourage innovation and efficiency in services.
- Designate additional resources for hiring interpreter/translation services for non-English speakers and people with disabilities, in all needed languages and at equitable pay rates.
- Disclose all contracting and spending in the City's response to date, including to and from: City departments; Mayoral offices, City corporations like [H+H](#) and [EDC](#), and nonprofits.

- Ensure that resources requested from State and Federal agencies prioritize expanded funding for legal services, care coordination, transitional and long-term housing, employment support, health and mental health services, and other human services.

- Legal Services: Work with legal services providers to accurately identify full funding for emergency, triaged legal needs and additional multi-year legal representation.
- Care Coordination:
 - Extend navigation services into sustained care management; resource comprehensive training across navigators; expand [satellite sites](#) with community providers to host/locate more sites.
 - Fund people-centered data management infrastructure unified across programs, prioritizing strong protections for clients who fear enforcement (review models from [other jurisdictions](#)).
 - Work with NYS to fund a sustained food assistance program, as in other jurisdictions.
- Mental Health Services: Fund an expansive, community-based network of mental health providers offering trauma-informed, culturally, and linguistically appropriate, acute and long-term counseling.
- Housing: Expand funds for community organizations, congregations, and networks offering housing, investing in long-term housing solutions that support migrating families (e.g., stabilization beds).
- Employment:
 - Expand funding for sustained, accessible workforce development trainings, and other support such as donated technology and transportation that lift barriers to employment.
 - Fund access to, and outreach for, childcare via community/faith-based organizations.
 - Create pathways for new communities to start their own businesses and access City and State contracting, including through access to NYS Licensing Act regardless of immigration status.

CONCLUSION

NYC has long expressed pride in its identity as a sanctuary city—a refuge for all migrants. The city has the infrastructure within the human services sector to fully address the needs of its residents. This can only happen when human services organizations and community networks are seen as equal partners, and funded as ones by City, State, and Federal governments. The proposed local laws and resolutions can support a compassionate and comprehensive welcome to our newest neighbors if implemented in true partnership with migrating communities, and with meaningful investment in community human services infrastructures in NYC. This approach not only helps our newest neighbors: it strengthens support systems that New Yorkers already need.

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ⁱ The City should use collaboration development models with partners, as it [has previously shared](#).

ⁱⁱ NYC made an emergency procurement declaration in July 2022, requested by DHS pursuant to Section 315 of the NYC Charter and Section 3-06 of the Procurement Policy Board Rules. An Emergency Executive Order was announced in October 2022.