



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER
SCOTT M. STRINGER

May 12, 2017

Nisha Agarwal
Commissioner
Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs
253 Broadway, 14th Fl.
New York, NY 10007

Re: New York City Citizenship Fund

Dear Commissioner Agarwal,

I am writing to thank you for the good work of your office, and to share with you a new policy proposal that I am hoping our offices' can work on together. At a time when the federal government continues to ratchet up its attacks on our immigrant communities through stepped up enforcement actions and attempted harmful travel restrictions, I believe it's more important than ever that cities like New York advance new strategies to protect our immigrant communities. Creating a public-private New York City Citizenship Fund to help more New Yorkers afford the high cost of citizenship could be an important step in that direction.

The goal of this public-private partnership is simple: to help more eligible New Yorkers pay for the \$725 fee that the federal government charges to apply for citizenship – a cost that has risen more than 500 percent since 1989. As envisioned, the New York City Citizenship Fund could be seeded with a modest sum of City dollars which, in turn, could help to leverage additional private, charitable funds from those interested in helping their fellow New Yorkers secure the rights and privileges of citizenship. As you know, there are roughly 670,000 immigrants in New York City who despite being eligible to apply for citizenship have not yet done so, in part because of the ever-rising application costs.

In the attached report by my office, "The New York Citizenship Fund: Expanding Access to Citizenship in the Five Boroughs," we lay out a possible framework for this idea. Our office has estimated that with an initial allocation of roughly \$20 million in public funds, the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) could engage a non-profit partner or partners to help screen and cover the application costs for some 35,600 eligible New Yorkers making between 150 percent and 300 percent of poverty, or those whose incomes are just high enough to disqualify

them for a full federal waiver of the application fee. Beyond that, in order to tap into the enormous generosity of New Yorkers, a special fund for private contributions could be set up within the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City (Mayor's Fund) to help expand the reach of the program and cover more people.

As you know, the Mayor's Fund is already working with the MOIA to support NYCitizenship, a "public-private partnership that is providing comprehensive information on the naturalization process and access to legal services and financial counseling in our City's public schools and libraries."¹ While this effort is providing much needed information and legal help for those seeking to naturalize, it is not directly covering the federal application costs, which would be the core focus of the New York City Citizenship Fund. We think that such a fund could be an important compliment to the work of your office and hope you will consider how we might work together to build and grow such a tool.

I know you share my concerns over the enormous sense of fear and anxiety that is now coursing through so many of neighborhoods, as the federal government continues its aggressive attack on immigrant communities across our nation. It's a frightening time, but also an opportunity to think strategically about how we as a city can harness the sense of urgency and compassion that so many New Yorkers feel. Creating a New York City Citizenship Fund to help more New Yorkers gain the sense of security and safety that only citizenship can provide would be a great step forward and a potential model for other cities and states to follow.

Thank you in advance for your time and attention.

Sincerely,



Scott M. Stringer
New York City Comptroller

cc: Darren Bloch
Executive Director
Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City
253 Broadway, 6th Floor
New York, New York 10007

¹ <http://www1.nyc.gov/site/fund/initiatives/immigration.page>