



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER
BRAD LANDER



THE COUNCIL OF
THE CITY OF NEW YORK
Shahana Hanif
39TH DISTRICT

May 9, 2023

The Honorable Eric Adams
Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Re: Prioritizing Immigration Legal Services to Assist Asylum Seekers On Pathways Out of Shelter

Dear Mayor Adams,

The Adams Administration and the City of New York deserve credit for rapidly scaling up shelter provision for the tens of thousands of asylum seekers who have arrived in our city over the past year. Moreover, we support your efforts to insist that the Federal and State governments provide the City with the resources needed to meet what are largely Federal and State obligations. Nonetheless, we also believe it is critical – not only for those seeking asylum, but also for the City’s long-term fiscal stability – to significantly ramp up outreach and legal immigration services to help asylum seekers navigate the paperwork that will enable them to live, work, and contribute to our city.

We were pleased to learn that your Administration has begun a pilot direct outreach campaign at the DHS facilities, and that you have launched an RFP for to expand similar outreach throughout the system, to order to identify whether asylum seekers have received work authorization. We believe direct outreach is a critical first step in providing asylum seekers with pathways out of shelter.”

However, with the expiration of Title 42 fast approaching, our shelter population surpassing a record 87,000 individuals, and with many migrants approaching the one-year deadline to submit asylum applications, we believe that the City – in its own interest, as well as that of migrant families – must do more to actively assist asylum seekers to submit their applications for asylum, to submit their applications for work authorization, to obtain legal employment opportunities in New York City and elsewhere, and to move out of shelter and into permanent housing.

Given the scale and urgency of this crisis, the City must engage in an “all hands” effort. This should include:

- the expansion of direct outreach and door-knocking programs to asylum seekers throughout entire the HERRC and DHS shelter system;
- systems for data collection, case prioritization, and follow-up contact (while protecting asylum seekers’ privacy and security);
- scaling up pro-se clinics, volunteer support, and direct legal assistance which empower newcomer migrants by providing them information on the U.S. immigration process, eligibility requirements for asylum and work authorization, and assistance in completing relevant application forms.

The City must act quickly to scale up its outreach efforts and expand its capacity to provide legal services to the hundreds of migrant families arriving each day with an additional investment of at least \$70 million in immigration legal services, as called for by New York Immigration Coalition and legal service providers including Catholic Charities and Legal Aid Society. This request for funding includes:

- \$10 million to scale up pro se legal clinics that assist newcomers in applying for asylum, Temporary Protected Status, and other work authorization programs, ensuring that legal aid providers have the capacity and resources they need to adequately assist, counsel, and represent the tens of thousands of migrants in the City's care and place them on a path of self-sufficiency; and
- \$60 million for full legal representation to address the massive backlog in NYC immigration courts (with 127,000 cases pending).

With these funds, the City could expand programs such as ActionNYC, the Immigrant Opportunity Initiative (IOI), and the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP), that have existing contracts with dozens of legal service providers across the five boroughs. The City should also leverage partnerships with local law schools by expanding the capacity and adapting existing programs, like CUNY Citizenship NOW, to meet the needs of this new immigrant population; recruit law firms to provide pro-bono assistance (such as the Pomerantz law firm is doing with Win); and encourage religious congregations, nonprofit, voluntary, and community organizations to assist with outreach and translation.

With a dedicated all-hands outreach effort and an investment of \$70 million for legal services, the City can significantly reduce the shelter length of stay, redeploy existing shelter space for people newly in need or newly arrived, reduce the number of people otherwise in the shelter system, and save significantly on the costs of operating shelters.

As immigrants have for generations, these new arrivals have the potential to contribute greatly to NYC's economic and cultural vitality. Their success, and their contributions to NYC, depend on taking the next step now to help them establish new lives here.

Sincerely,



Brad Lander
New York City Comptroller



Shahana Hanif
Councilmember, District 39
Chair, Committee on Immigration