Testimony of FPWA

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New York City Council Committee on Immigration
Chair Elsie Encarnación
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We are grateful to the City Council Committee on Immigration for holding this hearing and to Chair Elsie Encarnación and members of the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of FPWA (Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies).

FPWA is a leading anti-poverty, social policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening human services organizations and faith institutions and advancing economic security and justice for all New Yorkers. Since 1922, FPWA has driven groundbreaking policy reforms to better serve those in need. We work to dismantle the structural and systemic barriers that impede economic security and well-being, and we strengthen the capacity of human services agencies and faith organizations so New Yorkers with lower incomes can thrive and live with dignity.

At FPWA we proudly serve a membership base of over 170 faith-based institutions and human services organizations. These are the institutions that New Yorkers turn to for solace, to engage with community, to practice their faiths, and to receive direct services. Immigrants are integrated into every part of New York life and are part of the constituencies and congregations of our members. We come here today to express our concern for the well-being of both our members and the communities they serve. We ask city council to protect immigrant New Yorkers' access to critical services and information about their rights.

We ask that city council do the following:

1. Pass Intro-0055-2026 requiring city agencies to provide signage which advises New Yorkers of their rights when confronted with a federal agent both under New York City's Sanctuary City Law and the federal Constitution.
2. Increase funding for immigration legal services and Know Your Rights Campaigns.
3. Create public information campaigns concerning access to benefits to address the chilling effect that changes in federal policy concerning public charge rules may have on immigrant and mixed status families who have access to these benefits.
4. Increase funding to CCHR to $25 million to support not only the enforcement of New York City's Human Rights Law, but also to support the agency's public information campaigns about individuals' rights under the human rights law, which protects all New Yorkers including immigrants.

Pass Intro-0055-2026 Requiring City Agencies to Display Signage Concerning NYC Sanctuary City Law and Individual's Constitutional Rights When Confronted by Federal Agents

This Oversight hearing on Sanctuary Protections for Immigrant Communities comes at a critical moment for New Yorkers. Masked Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents are using aggressive and often illegal tactics to terrorize communities across the country, resulting in serious injury and at times death.[1] Here in New York City, ICE agents have targeted Canal Street

[1] Schuppe, J., & Ortiz, E. (2026, January 16). Trumps DHS immigration enforcement officers have shot 14 people since September: here's what to know. *NBC News*. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/ice-shootings-list-border-patrol-trump-immigration-operations-rcna254202

vendors in raids and clashed with peaceful protesters, and the federal government has threatened to withdraw funding from New York City due to our status as a Sanctuary City.[2,3,4] Following the revocation of ICE's "sensitive locations" policy in January of 2025, ICE agents have continually targeted the immigration legal system at 26 Federal Plaza by detaining immigrants reporting for ICE check-in appointments and Immigration Court hearings.[5] At Federal Plaza, ICE is also holding immigrants in overcrowded and squalid conditions, and the Department of Justice has fired experienced immigration judges.[6,7]

In this context, we are grateful to Councilmembers Avilés, Cabán, Louis, and Encarnación for introducing Intro-0055-2026 requiring the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA), in consultation with the Law Department, to develop signage that outlines New York City's Sanctuary law and informs individuals of their rights when interacting with federal immigration authorities. While the passage of this law is a great first step to educating New Yorkers about their rights both under New York City Sanctuary Law and their constitutional protections, we ask that New York City take greater steps to educate immigrant communities about their rights and privileges.

Increase Funding for Immigration Legal Services, Know Your Rights Campaigns, and Human Services Agencies

FPWA members have confirmed the negative effect that ICE and CBP have had on immigrants across the city. Immigrants are afraid to go to school, work, or houses of worship, and are increasingly afraid to access direct services that they receive through trusted member agencies. Some have seen their families separated by ICE detention and deportations and are experiencing very reasonable fears about their ability to remain safe and meet their needs during a time of severe federal antagonism towards immigrants.

Agencies and faith-institutions are not free from these fears. Agency staff members have reported feeling deep uncertainty and anxiety. Many human service organizations and faith institutions have had to train staff on what to do if ICE or CBP attempt to enter their facilities at a time where there is significant mistrust

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[2] Li, D. K., & Silva, D. (2025, October 24). New York City's Canal Street slowly rebounds after ICE raid. *NBC News*. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/new-york-citys-canal-street-slowly-rebounds-ice-raid-rcna239161

[3] Hall, R., & Scheid, R. (2025, November 30). New Yorkers Thwart ICE Raids, Highlighting Challenges for Trump's Crackdown in Nation's Immigrant Capital. *Time Magazine*. https://time.com/7337578/ice-raid-new-york-mamdani/

[4] Mena, K. (2026, January 15). New York officials push back on Trump's sanctuary city funding threat. *Spectrum News NY1*. https://ny1.com/nyc/all-boroughs/politics/2026/01/15/new-york-officials-push-back-on-trump-sanctuary-city-funding-threat/

[5] Ferré-Sadurní, L., Medina, L., Bencosme, L., Blanco, G., Kim, J., Pena, A., & Seekamp D. (2025, August 4). Inside the epicenter of ICE detentions in NYC. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/video/nyregion/100000010299370/inside-the-epicenter-of-ice-detentions-in-nyc.html

[6] Hogan, G. (2026, February 9). ICE moved detainees to previously undisclosed floor of 26 Federal Plaza. *The City*. https://www.thecity.nyc/2026/02/09/26-federal-plaza-jail-conditions-ice-judge-kaplan-ruling/

[7] Ley, A. (2025, December 1). Trump Administration fires 8 immigration judges in New York. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/01/nyregion/immigration-judges-fired-trump.html

that ICE and federal law enforcement agencies will not abide by the law. Some organizations have had to transition back to virtual events due to community and staff concerns about law enforcement. These concerns have additionally made organizing far more difficult, as immigrants and community members fear being targeted as a result of their participation.

These fears have also complicated the capacity of organizations to serve their communities and have introduced more uncertainty into their budgets. Federal policies, including those related to federal grants that are ultimately passed through to New York City providers, have been continually withheld or challenged. For example, the AmeriCorps program, a federal program that has trained generations of New York community leaders for public service jobs, has seen funding pulled and then restored, causing considerable confusion and leaving staff members in an uncomfortable limbo.[8] Increasing funding to human services agencies will ensure that organizations have reliable funding to continue to provide essential services for all New Yorkers, including immigrants.

As organizations, staff, and communities grapple with these fears, it is increasingly important that the City provide accurate and timely information by providing Know Your Rights trainings and expanded immigration legal services. These programs are vital to the well-being of immigrant families as well as the staff who serve them. We are pleased to see that the Mayor included over $31 million in funding for immigration legal services in the preliminary budget to support MOIA Legal Support Centers and immigration deportation defense and other legal services.[9] We encourage the City to further expand its support by increasing funding for immigration legal services as well as the expansion of Know Your Rights Campaigns to support immigrant communities at this time.

Ensure that Public Information Campaigns Advise Immigrant New Yorkers About Changes in Immigration Policies and Their Impact on Benefits Access

The affordability crisis in New York City has affected the vast majority of its residents. Across the City 62 percent of people—and 72 percent of families with children—are economically insecure, meaning they do not have the resources necessary to meet household costs, set aside savings both for future planning and for short-term emergencies, and manage debt.[10] Moreover, economic mobility has declined and

[8] Letitia James New York State Attorney General. (2025, August 29). Attorney General James Stops Dismantling of AmeriCorps Programs. New York State Office of the Attorney General. https://ag.ny.gov/press-release/2025/attorney-general-james-stops-dismantling-americorps-programs#:~:text=AG%20James%20and%20Coalition%20of%2024%20Other,Anti%2DPoverty%2C%20Education%2C%20Health%2C%20and%20Other%20Services%20Nationwide.

[9] New York Immigration Coalition. (2026, February 17). Mayor Mamdani's Budget Prioritizes New Yorkers' Needs [Press release]. https://www.nyic.org/2026/02/mayor-mamdanis-budget-prioritizes-new-yorkers-needs/

[10] Martin, B. & Launius, J. (2025). *True Cost of Economic Security: Policy Implications for New York City*. FPWA. https://www.fpwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/True-Cost-of-Economic-Security_Policy-Implications-for-New-York-City_9.29.25-1.pdf

wages have stagnated, leaving economic security out of reach for most New Yorkers.[11,12] While economic insecurity impacts all boroughs, it is especially concentrated in areas with higher immigrant populations.

This is in sharp contrast with the major contributions immigrants make to the City's economy. In 2021, immigrant New Yorkers paid $61 billion in taxes and constituted $138 billion in spending power.[13] Immigrants start businesses at high rates, creating jobs for themselves and others and providing valuable products and services. Undocumented immigrants, while ineligible for Social Security, Medicaid, and most public benefits, contribute billions of dollars into Social Security through payroll tax deductions and local, state, and federal taxes.[14,15] Undocumented immigrants alone paid $3.1 billion in state and local taxes in New York in 2022, despite being ineligible for nearly all major public benefits.[16]

FPWA has long advocated for income supports for all New Yorkers who would benefit from them. Programs like the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and health insurance programs like Medicaid act as essential lifelines for those in need. This position has long been validated by research that shows income support programs both yield significant positive impacts on adults, children, and communities, and significant economic benefits and cost-savings to federal, state, and local governments.

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[11] Isaacs, J. B. (2016). *International Comparisons of Economic Mobility*. The Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/02_economic_mobility_sawhill_ch3.pdf

[12] Mishel, L., Gould, E., & Bivens, J. (2015). *Wage Stagnation in Nine Charts*. Economic Policy Institute. https://www.epi.org/publication/charting-wage-stagnation/

[13] New York City Comptroller Mark Levine. (2024, January 4*).* Facts, Not Fear: How Welcoming Immigrants Benefits New York City. New York City Office of the Comptroller. https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/facts-not-fear-how-welcoming-immigrants-benefits-new-york-city/

[14] New York City Comptroller Mark Levine. (2024, January 4*).* Facts, Not Fear: How Welcoming Immigrants Benefits New York City. New York City Office of the Comptroller. https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/facts-not-fear-how-welcoming-immigrants-benefits-new-york-city/

[15] Shoichet, C.E. (2023, April 18). Undocumented immigrants are paying their taxes today, too. *CNN*. https://www.cnn.com/2023/04/18/us/undocumented-immigrants-taxes-cec/index.html#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20according%20to%20the,annually%20through%20payroll%20tax%20deductions

[16] Sundaram, A. (2024, August 4). Undocumented immigrant workers in NY pay over $3B in taxes, report says. *Gothamist*. https://gothamist.com/news/undocumented-immigrant-workers-in-ny-pay-over-3b-in-taxes-report-says?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=1749823816&gbraid=0AAAAD9J8hHNXANf1EEMXmqeZwhJmN6pO&gclid=Cj0KCQiAk6rNBhCxARIsAN5mQLsg8T5igQLa9z-nyvb-PdLKJuffshAQ85bwmfQdoxLCAuxzqswysQgaAmvREALw_wcB

SNAP reduces poverty and food insecurity and enhances educational advancement, especially among children, but also provides benefits to our economy.[17,18,19] USDA estimates that every $5 in SNAP benefits generates $9 in economic activity.[20] Similarly, WIC reduces household food insecurity in recipient households with children under 5 years old by at least 20 percent and WIC enrollment and utilization during pregnancy are associated with improved birth outcomes, including lower risk of preterm birth, low birth weight, and perinatal death. [21,22] Every $1 in prenatal WIC services saves about $2.48 in medical, educational, and productivity costs over a newborn's lifetime.[23] These programs also effectively respond to economic downturns, swiftly injecting spending into local economies and supporting businesses during periods of financial stress while providing immediate relief to families facing financial hardship.

Despite their incredible contributions to New York's economy, immigrant and mixed status families are not immune to the affordability challenges New York families are facing. One of the main concerns around accessing necessary public benefits is the potential chilling effect that the federal government's proposed rule concerning public charge may have on immigrants across the City. Public charge is an immigration test that considers whether an individual is likely to become primarily dependent on the government for subsistence and is used as grounds to deny permanent residency and other statuses. While the federal government has used public charge assessments in immigration decisions for more than a century, it did not define the term until 1999. From 1999 until the first Trump Administration, the same definition was in use, providing clear guidance to immigrant families. Under this definition, immigrant families were explicitly reassured that participation in programs like SNAP, WIC, the Child Nutrition Programs, and other means-tested, non-cash benefits would not affect their ability to become lawful permanent residents.

Under the first Trump Administration, the Department of Homeland Security issued a new regulation substantially broadening the definition of public charge but clearly excluding consideration of some

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[17] Tiehen, L., Jolliffe, D., & Smeeding, T. M. (2015). *SNAP Matters: How Food Stamps Affect Health and Well-Being*. University of Wisconsin-Madison Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP). https://www.irp.wisc.edu/resource/the-effect-of-snap-on-poverty/

[18] Li, Y., Mills, B., Davis, G. C., & Mykerezi, E. (2014). Child food insecurity and the Food Stamp Program: what a difference monthly data make. *Social Service Review*, 88(2), 322–348. https://uknowledge.uky.edu/ukcpr_papers/29

[19] Beharie, N., Mercado, M., & McKay, M. (2017). A Protective Association between SNAP Participation and Educational Outcomes Among Children of Economically Strained Households. *Journal of hunger & environmental nutrition*, *12*(2), 181–192. https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2016.1227754

[20] Canning, P. & Stacy, B. (2019). *The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Economy: New Estimates of the SNAP Multiplier*. United States Department of Agriculture. https://ers.usda.gov/sites/default/files/_laserfiche/publications/93529/ERR-265.pdf?v=70863

[21] Kreider, B., Pepper, J. V., & Roy, M. (2016). Identifying the effects of WIC on food insecurity among infants and children. *Southern Economic Journal, 82*(4), 1106–1122. https://doi.org/10.1002/soej.12078

[22] Fingar, K. R., Lob, S. H., Dove, M. S., Gradziel, P., & Curtis, M. P. (2017). Reassessing the Association between WIC and Birth Outcomes Using a Fetuses-at-Risk Approach. *Maternal and child health journal*, *21*(4), 825–835. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-016-2176-9

[23] Nianogo, R. A., Wang, M. C., Basurto-Davila, R., Nobari, T. Z., Prelip, M., Arah, O. A., & Whaley, S. E. (2019). Economic evaluation of California prenatal participation in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) to prevent preterm birth. *Preventive medicine*, *124*, 42–49. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2019.04.011

benefits. This rule change was found to have a chilling effect not only on immigrants, but also on U.S.-citizen families and U.S.-citizen children who were less likely to apply for and receive benefits for which they were eligible. Under the Biden Administration, the definition of public charge was restored to the 1999 definition. In November 2025, however, the current Trump Administration proposed to rescind the 2022 restoration which limits the factors that DHS can consider when determining an individual is a public charge and allow them to consider "any other factors or information relevant" and promulgate policies and tools to aid their assessment in the future.[24]

By removing the explicit limits in current regulations regarding which benefits may be considered, the proposed rule suggests that *any* means-tested benefit, received or applied for at any time and in any amount, even when used by U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident family members, could be treated as negative evidence in immigration determinations.[25] This runs the risk of creating a sweeping "chilling effect" and prompt U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, and immigrants to go without or withdraw from these benefits.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has acknowledged that public benefits "play a significant role" in helping individuals work, attend school, and maintain their health.[26] DHS's own 2018 analysis, based on a far narrower proposal, warned that disenrollment from public benefits by eligible immigrants could result in worse health outcomes, greater use of emergency rooms due to delayed medical care, higher uncompensated care costs, increased spread of communicable diseases, higher rates of poverty and housing instability, and reduced productivity and educational attainment.[27] These harms would be significantly magnified under the proposed rule which is far more expansive. DHS now estimates that at least 446,664 individuals, many of them children, would lose access to SNAP due to disenrollment, which is likely an underestimation given the proposal's broad and undefined scope.[28]

While the city cannot dictate federal immigration policy, it must help immigrant New Yorkers understand and navigate these changes. We ask that city council create timely, clear public information campaigns about changes in federal immigration policy, and that these campaigns utilize simplified language and are available in translation into languages that are reflective of the breadth and diversity of the New Yorks immigrant communities. We particularly urge the City Council to provide immigrants with information

[24] Public Charge Ground of Inadmissibility. (2025, November 19). Federal Register. https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/11/19/2025-20278/public-charge-ground-of-inadmissibility#page-52214
[25] Public Charge Ground of Inadmissibility. (2025, November 19). Federal Register. https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/11/19/2025-20278/public-charge-ground-of-inadmissibility#page-52214
[26] Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds. (2018, October 10). Federal Register. https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/10/10/2018-21106/inadmissibility-on-public-charge-grounds
[27] Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds. (2018, October 10). Federal Register. https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/10/10/2018-21106/inadmissibility-on-public-charge-grounds
[28] Public Charge Ground of Inadmissibility. (2025, November 19). Federal Register. https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/11/19/2025-20278/public-charge-ground-of-inadmissibility#page-52214

about benefits programs, as well as how changes in immigration policy at the federal level may impact them and their families.

Increase funding for CCHR to $25 million

The New York City Human Rights Law (CHRL), which is administered by the New York City Commission on Human Rights (CCHR), prohibits discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations, and it protects against discriminatory lending practices, retaliation, discriminatory harassment, and bias-based profiling by law enforcement. It is one of the most comprehensive civil rights laws in the country and extends the State and Federal list of protected classes to explicitly include immigrants.[29] This agency has been severely underfunded and understaffed, preventing New Yorkers from enforcing their civil rights. Underfunding CCHR not only impacts the ability of the agency to enforce the law, but it also its ability to launch and sustain public information campaigns to inform New Yorkers of their rights. As with public benefits, a lack of information on how to identify and fight discrimination in housing and the workplace creates significant barriers for immigrants to be free of these challenges and have recourse for infractions. An increase in funding to $25 million per year could be used to help support both public information campaigns and address complaints.

Conclusion

We are in a time of unprecedented federal hostility towards immigrants regardless of their status. As the Trump administration continues to weaponize ICE and CBP against citizens and non-citizens alike, we are encouraged to see the City step up to inform New York's immigrant communities of their rights through Intro 0055-2026.[30] New York City stands as a bastion of diversity. By increasing investments in legal services and expanding public information campaigns including Know Your Rights, the City can continue this longstanding commitment as a city that welcomes all its residents. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony before the committee, and for your time and attention to these critical issues. FPWA looks forward to working with you to protect, defend, and support immigrant New Yorkers.

[29] NYC Commission on Human Rights. (n.d.) Human Rights. The New York City Commission on Human Rights. Retrieved March 10, 2026. https://www.nyc.gov/site/cchr/law/the-law.page

[30] Foy, N. & Maney, S. (2025, October 6). We found that more than 170 U.S. citizens have been held by immigration agents. they've been Kicked, dragged and detained for days. *ProPublica*. https://www.propublica.org/article/immigration-dhs-american-citizens-arrested-detained-against-will