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DE BLASIO ADMINISTRATION ALLOCATES \$4.1 MILLION TO PROVIDE LEGAL ASSISTANCE FOR MIGRANT CHILDREN AND SEPARATED FAMILIES

Announcement comes as volunteer City delegation returns from week of providing pro bono help to hundreds of detained families at the southern border

NEW YORK—As a group of volunteer attorneys recruited from several City agencies returns after spending a week assisting detained immigrant families near the southern border, the City announced that it has earmarked \$4.1 million to provide legal assistance for migrant children, both unaccompanied minors and separated children in New York City. This funding will also provide access to legal risk assessments and screening for those seeking to be sponsors for migrant children.

"The Trump Administration's cruel and inhumane attacks on immigrant families seeking refuge in our country is un-American. Those are not New York City's values, which is why we are stepping up and speaking out to help these families and call on the President to reunite the over 400 remaining separated children," said **Mayor de Blasio**. "Mothers and fathers need to be able to hug and console their children and we are doing everything we can to help by providing free high-quality legal services."

"We are proud that New York City is a city of immigrants. And we are a city where people take care of one another," said **First Lady Chirlane McCray**. "The services available in New York City are an example of our commitment to reunite and support families torn apart by the inhumane policies of the federal government. In New York City, we will never stop fighting for immigrant children and families."

"Under the leadership of Mayor de Blasio, the City made a tremendous investment to create a system for providing legal services that can mobilize quickly to address the emergent legal needs of immigrant New Yorkers," said **Department of Social Services Commissioner Steven Banks**. "Today we are using this system to shield immigrants against the draconian policies the federal government is implementing."

The Human Resources Administration's Office of Civil Justice and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs have been working with the City's legal services providers through the

Administration's Immigrant Opportunity Initiative (IOI) program to increase their capacity to meet urgent legal needs. These include the needs presented by separated children placed in federal facilities under the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in New York City, their families and loved ones seeking to become sponsors, and hundreds of unaccompanied minors settled here who are in need of legal representation.

This announcement comes on the heels of the completion of a City employee delegation to provide pro bono assistance to families facing detention near the southern border. Last week, Immigrant Affairs Commissioner Bitta Mostofi traveled to Dilley, Texas as a volunteer alongside fifteen colleagues—City attorneys and licensed clinical social workers—volunteering from the following agencies: Administration of Children Services, Department of Consumer Affairs, Law Department, Mayor's Community Affairs Unit, Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, Mayor's Office of Special Enforcement, NYC Commission on Human Rights, and NYC Health + Hospitals. The delegation was made possible due to support from private funders working with the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City.

Organized by the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA), the City volunteer group worked with the Dilley Pro Bono Project, a partner of the Immigration Justice Campaign. At the South Texas Family Residential Center, the largest U.S Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) family detention center in the country, the volunteers assisted in approximately 300 cases. Among their duties, volunteers prepared families seeking asylum for credible fear interviews and provided mental health screenings for children and families, including once-separated families.

Through the Administration's IOI network of legal service providers the \$4.1M funding allocation will allow the Administration to:

- Further increase capacity for legal defense in deportation proceedings for over 900 separated and unaccompanied immigrant youth;
- Increase funding for social work and case management resources to address the acute needs of these traumatized children; and
- Provide resources to address legal screening and risk assessment needs of family members seeking to be sponsors of separated children in ORR facilities in New York City, facilitating their release from ORR facilities.

The legal service providers include Catholic Charities, Catholic Migration Services, Central American Legal Assistance, Immigrant Justice Corps, Kids in Need of Defense, Legal Services NYC, New York Legal Assistance Group, Northern Manhattan Center for Immigrant Rights, Safe Passage Project, Sanctuary for Families, The Door, The Legal Aid Society, Urban Justice Center, Bronx Defenders, Brooklyn Defender Services, and Make the Road New York.

In FY 2014, Administration funding for immigration legal services was approximately \$2.1 million. Since then Mayoral funding for immigration legal services has increased dramatically. In FY 2018, the Administration raised its commitment to funding free immigration legal services to over \$30 million.

"Several separated children who were brought to our city have been reunited with their families at the border, but they continue to languish in detention," said **Bitta Mostofi, Commissioner of**

the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs. "It was a harrowing experience to speak directly to families separated by the Trump administration and to witness the systematic mistreatment of immigrant children and families up close. The de Blasio Administration will continue pushing to end both family separation and the erosion of asylum for those fleeing persecution and violence. With today's legal services announcement, even more migrant children who arrive in our city will receive critical representation and services to help fight for their safety.

"The Mayor's Fund believes in the power of public-private partnerships because they allow us to respond quickly to immediate needs. We are delighted to work with our philanthropic partners to provide funding to support legal assistance for families at the border. We are also proud to stand alongside the City as they increase their support for separated families," aid **Toya Williford, Executive Director of the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City.**

"I commend the First Lady and all the City volunteers who responded to the plight of immigrant families impacted by an inhumane federal government policy," said **Corporation Counsel Zachary W. Carter.** "I am particularly proud of the of the Law Department attorneys who helped children and families navigate complex immigration laws and legal issues, including pursuing asylum in the U.S. This successful initiative and the additional funding to protect immigrant youth has indeed put New York values in action."

"New York City has and will continue to be a city that protects immigrants. We will not sit by the sideline while unaccompanied minors get lost in a system in which more and more is being stacked against them," said **Chair and Commissioner of the NYC Commission on Human Rights, Carmelyn P. Malalis.** "Today's new investment will go a long way in protecting these vulnerable children so that they can get access to the care and legal services they need. I am proud to serve this city and will continue to partner with our sister agencies and use our resources to make sure immigrant communities are safe and protected."

"New Yorkers have once again stepped up to help families separated by this inhumane federal policy. ACS is proud that Tanya Molina, an attorney with the agency's Family Court Legal Services division, was part of the team providing vital legal services to detained families," said **ACS Commissioner David A. Hansell.** "The City's critical investment will ensure that hundreds of unaccompanied and separated youth get access to the legal support that they need."

"Here in New York, one in three of us were born in another country, myself included," said **DCA Commissioner Lorelei Salas.** "The City is committed to protecting all of us through education, enforcement, and ensuring that all immigrant families here in NYC—and across the country—have access to free, trustworthy services. This initiative will provide crucial legal services to the many families who have been separated by the Trump administration's egregious immigration policies. DCA is proud to stand together with our sister agencies in support of our immigrant brothers and sisters and will continue to fight for their rights."

"This roughly \$4 million in city funding will provide legal and other aid for victims of President Trump's abusive immigration policies, the hallmarks of which are massive deportations and family separations. The money comes on top of the City Council's commitment to helping immigrants and fighting back these cruel actions, including \$46 million in this year's budget to

provide immigrants with access to basic needs and legal services. Additionally, we allocated \$281,000, along with \$100,000 from the Robin Hood Foundation in a public-private initiative, to offer legal representation to minors separated from their families at the U.S. border. I applaud all of the City's efforts to assist minors facing deportation hearings and hope for a proper and humane immigration policy from our federal government," said **Council Speaker Corey Johnson**.

"The cruel, heartless policies of the Trump Administration demand that we do everything in our power to fight back. This commitment of legal funding to our city's most vulnerable population at a time when the federal government is set on abusing the immigration process for political means is extremely welcome, and I appreciate Mayor de Blasio and First Lady McCray's commitment to justice for these children," said **Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.**

"Mayor De Blasio continues to stand with immigrants and their children like no other public official in the nation. The additional funding for legal resources to help reunite children and parents separated at the border will tremendously help alleviate the hardships facing these families. With no end in sight to the current immigration reform impasse, these efforts are needed and define our resistance to a morally intolerable situation," declared **State Senator Luis Sepulveda, member of the State Senate Standing Committee on the Judiciary**.

"As New Yorkers we have an obligation to stand up for what's right. The Trump administration's barbaric treatment of immigrant families is antithetical to the values we hold as New Yorkers, and thanks to Mayor De Blasio, migrant children will receive the help they need to be reunited with their families. I commend him for his leadership," said **State Senator Brad Hoylman**.

"To rip a child from its mother is cruel and we must do all we can to make sure this incoherent practice stops. As immigrants we come to America in search of that "American Dream" and breaking families apart goes against the fabric upon which this nation was built. Today I am proud to applaud the De Blasio Administration for making a significant investment to ensure that the rights of these families are a priority," said **Assemblywoman Carmen De La Rosa**.

"This is a challenging time for children and families caught in a human rights crisis precipitated by the highest levels of our federal government," said **Council Member Stephen Levin, Chair of the General Welfare Committee**. "I'm proud that New York City has not abandoned its commitment to the values of inclusion and equity for every individual. This additional funding will go a long way to provide the basic rights and services our children deserve, and I applaud this administration's continued advocacy on these critical issues."

"Now more than ever, migrant children fleeing violence and persecution and seeking humanitarian relief in the U.S. need access lifesaving legal counsel. Today's announcement reaffirms New York City's commitment to defending these vulnerable minors," said **Beth Krause, Supervising Attorney in the Immigration Law Unit, The Legal Aid Society**. "The Legal Aid Society looks forward to working with the Mayor Bill de Blasio on this and other critical initiatives that strengthen New York as a sanctuary city."

"Immigrant Justice Corps commends Mayor de Blasio's administration for its rapid and effective response to the recent humanitarian crisis involving unaccompanied children separated from their families," said **Jojo Annobil, Executive Director, Immigrant Justice Corps**. "Time and time again, this administration has demonstrated its unprecedented commitment to protect New York City immigrants and to support and inspire legal services providers fighting zealously on behalf of these vulnerable populations. We look forward to continued productive collaboration."

"In this time of threat and anxiety for young immigrants and vulnerable families, Catholic Charities continues to support those who are most in need and who seek protection, safe haven, and new opportunity, said **C. Mario Russell, Esq. Director, Immigrant and Refugee Services at Catholic Charities**. "Catholic Charities welcomes the Mayor's renewed commitment to serve and support those affected by the administration's unjust actions and looks forward to a continued partnership in ongoing, important initiatives for immigrants. Our shared, longstanding tradition to welcome all newcomers-be they unaccompanied children, families, workers, refugees-is rooted in the belief that New York is stronger when immigrant communities of faith, family, and work are given new hope and possibility."

"Catholic Migration Services is proud to be part of a city that is committed to fighting for the rights of vulnerable New Yorkers wherever they may come from," said **Sharone Kaufman, Managing Attorney for Catholic Migration Services**.

"We are proud today to stand in solidarity with the de Blasio administration as we fight to defend the rights of these vulnerable young New Yorkers. No child should face the immigration process alone, and now these children won't have to," said **Rich Leimsider, Executive Director of the Safe Passage Project**.

"We are lucky in NYC to have a city that welcomes immigrants instead of demonizing them. The situation in Central America is indeed a crisis -- for those citizens and especially for children persecuted by criminal gangs," said **Anne Pilsbury, Executive Director of Central American Legal Assistance**.

"NYLAG applauds Mayor De Blasio, Commissioner Banks, and the Office of Civil Justice for recognizing the crisis facing separated and unaccompanied immigrant youth in New York City," said **Beth Goldman, President and Attorney-in-Charge of the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)**. "The City's commitment to funding critical legal services for these children, many of whom faced unspeakable violence in their home countries and were cruelly separated from their families while seeking refuge in the United States, will ensure that those most in need will be provided with quality representation and an opportunity for a better life."

"KIND greatly appreciates the de Blasio Administration's commitment to the protection of unaccompanied and separated children in New York City," said **KIND President Wendy Young**. "As a result of this funding, KIND's New York City office will be able to hire additional staff to provide free representation to these uniquely vulnerable children and help ensure that they are not returned to harm."

"The de Blasio administration has, once again, shown its leadership and commitment to protecting the most vulnerable members of our community," said **Judge Judy Harris Kluger, Executive Director of Sanctuary for Families**. "Attorneys from Sanctuary for Families, the largest provider of legal services for survivors of gender violence in the country, represent thousands of immigrant survivors, far too many who are children. These immigrant children have lived through unspeakable violence and abuse. This infusion of funding for legal services will give service providers, like Sanctuary, much-needed resources to assist these children along the path to safety and healing."

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