

SPEAKER

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DECEMBER 2022

NYC'S RESPONSE TO THE ARRIVAL OF ASYLUM SEEKERS



**NEW YORK CITY
COUNCIL**

Examining the City's Delivery of Services to Migrants & New Yorkers

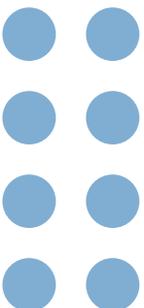
New York will always be a welcoming city that opens its doors to new arrivals. However, the sudden increase in asylum-seeking migrants has exposed the ways our existing city services are failing to meet the moment – for asylum seekers and long-time New Yorkers alike – and need to be overhauled.

Since the spring, over thirty thousand people have arrived in New York City seeking asylum to escape dire economic conditions, political violence, and other crises in their home countries. The New York City Council has prioritized the well-being of these individuals, as the Council recognizes that everyone is welcome to build a life and a home in our city. Addressing this crisis is challenging and complex, and requires concerted efforts across federal, state, and local governments. It also requires significant funding and logistical support from our partners in the federal and state government.

The Administration's underfunding and understaffing of city agencies has largely left non-profit, community-based organizations to provide essential services for asylum seekers and New Yorkers facing similar conditions. Yet, many of these organizations have not been funded or reimbursed by the City for their additional efforts during this crisis.

Access to shelter and permanent affordable housing, services for physical and mental health, self-sufficiency and employment opportunities, transportation, and education are essential. If we want to ensure that migrants and all New Yorkers are well-prepared for their future in New York City and beyond, we must take a multi-pronged approach to set them up for success.

The Council is advancing the below legislative and policy recommendations, which are organized by points in time on a migrant's journey, to ensure that migrants in our city, including asylum seekers, have the resources needed to thrive in their new home. The City must balance its focus on short and long-term solutions, and the identified areas below seek to prioritize this approach. While the recommendations are considered through the lens of our newest arrivals, all New Yorkers stand to benefit from these policy solutions, especially those without access to stable housing or in need of culturally competent services.



Short-Term Needs

1. Pre-arrival Priorities and Immediate Needs

Even before a migrant arrives in NYC, the City should proactively plan for their arrival. Currently, only rough estimates of the number of migrants expected in NYC and generalized information about their needs are readily available, making it challenging to assess gaps in services and immediate needs. Service providers, community-based organizations, and everyday New Yorkers have stepped up to provide resources for migrants, including transportation for relocation, interpretation services, and necessities such as food and clothing. Most of these organizations have not been compensated or reimbursed for their efforts. Additionally, many migrants have suffered both physical and mental trauma prior to and throughout their journey, so it is important to ensure that they are not placed in facilities or circumstances that exacerbate those conditions.

Recommendations:

- ◇ **Increase Communication among Cities, States, and Organizations:** The Administration should coordinate with governmental representatives of other municipalities and states to ascertain the number of people being sent to New York City along with relevant information about them. In addition, the Administration should communicate regularly with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to receive feedback and track progress through a formal communication stream that would allow for information to be shared in real time.
- ◇ **Expand Efforts to Connect Migrants with Family and Intra-City/State Transit:** The Administration should provide additional funding towards re-ticketing or reimbursing transportation service providers that are currently offering to relocate migrants to other states or cities where migrants may seek to settle or reunite with family.
- ◇ **Increase Funding for Urgent Living Essentials:** The Council is identifying additional funding sources to reimburse and/or compensate providers who have been providing services and in-kind support including food, clothing, housing, translation services, and access to information about educational opportunities. The Council calls on the Administration to do the same. Additionally, the Council is partnering with the New York Immigration Coalition to provide in-kind donations of clothes, coats, school supplies, baby formula, and other essentials.
- ◇ **Overhaul and Expand City Language Services:** The Council will consider legislation to expand upon the City's interpretation and translation services, including legislation that would require City agencies to provide services in additional languages when receiving an increase of new arrivals who do not speak English or one of the designated citywide languages.
- ◇ **Connect Migrants to Culturally Appropriate Mental Health Services:** The Council will consider legislation to require the City to utilize mental health coordinators to connect recently arrived migrants with culturally competent, trauma-informed, and language-accessible mental health services.
- ◇ **Increase Number of Beds and Shelter Programs for Young Migrants:** The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) should ensure that unaccompanied migrant youth ages 16-24 are connected with relevant runaway and homeless youth (RHY) programs and services. The Administration should provide additional funding to increase the number of beds available for young adults ages 21-24.
- ◇ **Create Standards for Temporary Humanitarian Centers:** The Council will consider legislation to ensure that all Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Centers (HERRCs), used to temporarily house migrants, are regulated to meet certain standards. These include safety precautions such as distance between beds, storage facilities for belongings, and access to wraparound services, including culturally competent mental health services.

2. Needs within the First Few Days of Arrival

According to advocates and service providers on the ground, food, legal services, and access to information about educational and employment opportunities are some of the most immediate needs migrants experience upon arrival. It is essential that parents are made aware of their children's educational rights. Migrants often experience food scarcity, as they cannot supplement the food they receive due to federal rules limiting their employment and income. They also have insufficient access to critical legal services needed to support their journey through the immigration system. For example, many are unaware of appointments with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (U.S.C.I.S.) or court appearances already scheduled, making them vulnerable to potential removal proceedings. Many migrants also have their identity documents forcibly taken from them during their migration journeys, subsequently making it difficult to access services in the city.

Recommendations:

◊ Culturally Competent Food Assistance:

The Administration should establish partnerships with local restaurants and businesses to provide and transport reliable supplies of culturally appropriate cuisine to migrants.

◊ Expand Legal Services with New Funding and Public-Private Partnerships:

The Administration should expand access to legal services for migrants by identifying additional funding sources and developing partnerships with major law firms to provide pro bono services. The Administration should facilitate connections between attorneys who are required to complete mandatory pro bono hours and programs that provide basic immigration services to migrants. These attorneys should receive adequate training and supervision from experienced immigration attorneys.

◊ Expand the Documents City Agencies

Recognize for IDNYC and Other Services:

The Council will consider legislation to expand the list of documents accepted to establish eligibility for IDNYC and other City resources.

◊ Help New Arrivals Navigate NYC with Public Transit:

The Administration should ensure all members of migrant families are provided with MetroCards and language-appropriate guidance on using public transportation.

◊ Multi-Lingual Staff at Family Welcome Centers:

The Administration should support migrant students by ensuring Family Welcome Centers have multilingual staff who can provide migrant families with information on all educational options.

◊ Work Permits for Newly Arriving Migrants:

Congress should pass specific legislation authorizing work permits for recently arrived migrants, similar to the legislation passed for Ukrainian refugees. The Council will continue to partner with the Administration and the New York State Congressional delegation to advance such legislation. The Biden Administration should also implement an administrative rule change that grants or extends temporary access to work permits.



Long-Term Needs

Migrants who intend to call New York City home in the long-term will likely share challenges experienced by all New Yorkers. These include a rising affordable housing crisis, limited job opportunities, and barriers to accessing health services and equitable educational opportunities.

1. Housing

For migrants entering the City's homeless shelter system, rising lengths of stay are compounded by a significant shortage of available affordable apartments and a lack of access to housing assistance. Advocates have underscored that shelter capacity issues are inextricably tied to the lack of efficient pathways to permanent affordable housing. While the City provides rental assistance to eligible New Yorkers through its City Family Homelessness & Eviction Prevention Supplement (CityFHEPS) voucher program, there are administrative and systemic challenges that persist, preventing individuals and families from successfully accessing permanent affordable housing. Even if an applicant is ultimately deemed eligible for a CityFHEPS voucher, they still often undergo a drawn-out approval process to access the subsidy, which has been worsened by an overburdened and short-staffed workforce. Additionally, rental applicants often experience source of income discrimination when seeking to utilize vouchers to pay their rent.

Even before the increase in individuals and families with children arriving in New York City from the southern border, there have been long-standing systemic issues in the City's shelter system. These include administrative inefficiencies, short-staffing, and low vacancy rates in the system, further exacerbated by limited access to permanent housing. Undocumented immigrants, whether recent arrivals or long-time New Yorkers, are currently ineligible for the CityFHEPS program, making it difficult for them to leave the shelter system.

Recommendations:

- ◊ **Allow Shelter Residents to Access City Rental Assistance Sooner:** The Council will consider legislation to eliminate the 90-day shelter-stay requirement for CityFHEPS voucher eligibility which delays New Yorkers' transitions out of the homeless shelter system.
- ◊ **Faster Approval Process for City Rental Assistance:** The Council will consider legislation to reduce administrative and procedural hurdles in accessing CityFHEPS vouchers. The Administration should expedite the Human Resources Administration (HRA) approval process for CityFHEPS.
- ◊ **Crackdown on Landlords' Illegal Denial of Rental Voucher:** The Administration should ensure that the Commission on Human Rights' Source of Income Discrimination Unit is fully staffed to enforce the illegal denial of apartments to New Yorkers using rental assistance vouchers.
- ◊ **Reduce the Documentation Needed to Enter City Shelters:** The Council will consider legislation to reduce the two-year housing history documentation requirements for shelter eligibility.
- ◊ **Ease Process for Families Seeking Shelter:** The Council will consider legislation to improve efficiency at the Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) family intake center, operated by the Department of Social Services. This includes increasing the number of PATH employees who serve as direct points of contact for families so that they can be accessible by telephone and have increased capacity to answer questions regarding applications to shelter.
- ◊ **Expand Social Services Available at City Shelters:** The Council will consider legislation to expand the number of eligibility specialists and housing specialists at shelters.

◊ **Build More Permanent Affordable Housing:**

Speaker Adams' Housing Agenda outlines actions that can be taken to increase the production of affordable housing with equitable distribution across the City (Fair Housing Framework), while deepening affordability to match the needs of New Yorkers. The Administration should ensure housing agencies are adequately resourced and staffed to reduce delays to housing production, ease backlogs in the pipeline of approved housing projects, and effectively preserve existing affordable housing. Increased city capital funding and city-state collaboration are also needed to increase the production of affordable and supportive housing.

◊ **Evaluate Supportive Services for New Yorkers**

Exiting Shelters: The Council will conduct oversight on the Homepage program and consider piloting a new or supplemental aftercare program to support New Yorkers transitioning from the homeless shelter system.

◊ **Make City Rental Assistance Available to All:**

The City and State should explore ways to make CityFHEPS vouchers available to individuals regardless of their immigration status, so that all New Yorkers can access rental assistance and leave the homeless shelter system, increasing its vacancy rate.

2. Economic Opportunity and Food Insecurity

Work authorization status may prevent new arrivals from securing paid employment, leaving them dependent on City services. Barring a regulatory and statutory change at the federal level, it may take months before migrants receive work permits. Limitations on the ability to earn employment and income will only exacerbate other needs of migrants, including access to food as they are likely ineligible for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and other benefits due to immigration status. Addressing the economic needs and food insecurity of undocumented New Yorkers must be considered long-term priorities.

Recommendations:

◊ **Workforce Development to Build on Migrants' Existing Skills:**

The Council will consider

legislation to expand existing city employment programs, such as those available through the Department of Small Business Services and Workforce1 centers, that offer job readiness opportunities and training to migrants.

◊ **Provide Food Assistance Program Information to Migrants:**

The Council will consider legislation requiring the Administration to provide detailed language-accessible and location-specific information about food pantries and soup kitchens to migrants.

3. Health

Many migrants have suffered physical and emotional trauma prior to and throughout their journey. The healthcare landscape may be unfamiliar to them, and they may not be eligible for health insurance. The City should ensure that migrants have access to comprehensive, holistic healthcare. Allowing medical issues to worsen can lead to health emergencies, where the only option for care is emergency room treatment. This is inhumane, inefficient, and unnecessarily expensive. The city must proactively provide preventative care so that we can address chronic health issues before they require hospitalization, and so that we can avoid overburdening our healthcare system.

Recommendations:

◊ **Connect Migrants with Free and Low-Cost City Healthcare:**

The Administration should utilize existing programs, such as NYC Care, to connect migrants to the Health + Hospitals system and ensure ongoing preventative and responsive healthcare.



◊ **Prepare City Workforce to Deliver Trauma-Informed Care:** The Council will consider legislation to require relevant City agencies to provide initial and ongoing training to all government personnel who regularly engage with asylum seekers. Their training should include, but not be limited to: recognizing signs of trauma exposure, understanding common behaviors of people exposed to trauma, and sensitive- or trauma-informed principles for interaction. The Administration should provide secondary trauma and resilience training and support, initially and at regular intervals, to City workers who routinely engage with asylum seekers.

4. Education

Migrant children who enter the City's public school system must receive an appropriate education. Language access, including the availability of multilingual teachers, as well as mental health and other supportive services, are essential to meeting the educational and social-emotional needs of these incoming students.

Recommendations:

- ◊ **Expand the Pool of Bilingual and Multilingual Teachers:** The Department of Education (DOE) should continue providing schools with additional funding for every student in temporary housing that is enrolled (since May 2022), including funding that can be used to hire more bilingual teachers. In addition, the Administration should explore how to increase the number of multilingual teachers available in DOE schools, especially teachers trained to support students with disabilities.
- ◊ **Ensure Schools Receive All Available Funding:** The Administration should provide technical assistance to ensure that schools are accessing all available funding, including Title I, Title III, and IDEA funding. Also the Administration should ensure that implementation of the recommendations issued by the Fair Student Funding (FSF) working group take into account the projected increase of migrant students.

◊ **Expand English Classes for Adults:** The Administration should expand and strengthen adult ESOL/literacy programs to meet the current demand from recent arrivals and long-time New Yorkers.

◊ **Language Access Coordinators in All Schools:** The Administration should provide at least one Language Access Coordinator in each school. Each school's Language Access Coordinator provides families with language-appropriate guidance on accessing early intervention services and Individual Education Program (IEP) evaluations. Information on accessing these services should also be made available through periodic DOE informational sessions.

◊ **Expand Multilingual Mental Health Services for Students:** The Administration should seek multilingual mental health counselors through the International Federation of Social Work and the American Psychological Association to provide culturally competent and linguistically appropriate mental healthcare to students.

◊ **Remove Barriers to Retaining Multilingual Teachers:** The State should review its requirement for certification and recertification tests which have in the past disproportionately decertified multilingual teachers.

◊ **Support Schools in Securing Student Records:** The Administration should follow up with service providers to help ensure schools are actively working to obtain both education and health records for new migrant students.

◊ **Expand Childcare to All:** The Council advanced \$10 million in the city budget to support childcare for undocumented children in New York City before the significant increase in arrivals of families seeking asylum. The Administration should prioritize operationalizing this program that launched last week, and secure funding for appropriate expansions to meet the need.