

**Testimony of Commissioner Vilda Vera Mayuga
New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection**

**Before the Committees on Consumer and Worker Protection and Immigration
Hearing on Combating Immigration Services Fraud and
Introductions 205 and 980**

April 15, 2025

Introduction

Good afternoon, Chair Menin, Chair Aviles, and members of the Committees. My name is Vilda Vera Mayuga, Commissioner of the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP). Today, I am joined by our General Counsel, Michael Tiger, and Assistant Commissioner of External Affairs, Carlos Ortiz. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on immigration services fraud and related legislation as we continue our shared mission to protect immigrant New Yorkers from harm and exploitation.

Protecting New Yorkers

DCWP is a key resource for all New Yorkers, providing fundamental consumer and worker protections, and financial empowerment programming across the five boroughs. We are dedicated to ensuring that consumers who have been exploited or deceived have a recourse, that workers have a passionate defender of their rights and that all New Yorkers have the support they need to improve their financial health. All of these protections and resources are available to New Yorkers regardless of immigration status. In the past three years, we have helped deliver more than \$1.3 billion back to New Yorkers through debt relief efforts, restitution, and financial empowerment programming.

DCWP Legal Authority

In New York City, DCWP protects immigrant consumers in several ways using our broad consumer protection powers. This includes laws and rules we enforce regarding immigration service providers, which are businesses that charge fees for any kind of immigration-related service. DCWP also licenses employment agencies, which are businesses that provide job search assistance for a fee. Lastly, we use our signature Consumer Protection Law, which applies to all businesses in New York City, to prohibit deceptive or unconscionable business practices against New Yorkers.

Immigration service providers are not lawyers and there are prohibitions and limits to the types of services they can provide to consumers seeking immigration-related assistance. We have also found employment agencies to similarly target immigrant communities and individuals. DCWP conducts enforcement of immigration service providers and employment agencies through field inspections and attorney-led investigations that lead to actions before the Office of Administrative Trials and Hearings or State Court.

Fraudulent immigration service providers and employment agencies remain an ongoing challenge for us due to their fly-by-night nature. Many operate out of temporary storefronts, private residences, instant messaging apps or online platforms, only to disappear after being paid by a consumer. Additionally, due to fear of government interaction, immigrant communities often hesitate to file complaints which are essential to an investigatory process. Regardless, DCWP continues to use its civil enforcement authority where and when we can to hold unscrupulous businesses accountable, to educate New Yorkers on their rights, and to encourage consumers to come to us when those rights have been exploited.

Enforcement and Education

In 2025, we have escalated efforts to better support immigrant communities in light of recent events. For example, last month I convened a roundtable of community leaders and legal advocates to discuss and identify emerging trends of consumer harm and ways to strengthen our collaboration to support New Yorkers. We have also engaged with each of the City's districts' attorneys' offices and the New York State Attorney General's office to establish sustainable partnerships that reduce duplicative efforts, improve information sharing, and better our interagency coordination.

Recently, our field enforcement team conducted proactive inspections of businesses advertising themselves as immigration service providers, as well as employment agencies. In the past two months, the team conducted over 750 inspections, resulting in almost 80 summonses. We have also stepped up our investigations, including major results against immigration service providers and employment agencies, such as \$100,000 in penalties against Horizonte de Esperanza Corp., and a trial decision of \$1.6 million, with significant consumer restitution against CMP Employment for illegal activity targeting immigrants. Lastly, under our consumer protection law, we investigated ASA College after receiving photographs of false and deceptive advertisements the for-profit school was using in New York City subways. These advertisements were clearly targeted to immigrants, with promises of assistance in obtaining certain visas if one were enrolled at the school. Our efforts resulted in a settlement agreement with ASA, ultimately putting it out of business and stopping further harm to immigrant students.

As I mentioned to the committees before, we always want to ensure that our enforcement is paired with education, so that we are empowering consumers with the information they need to protect themselves on the frontend. For example, we are currently running a digital education campaign across social media platforms to highlight and educate New Yorkers on their protections related to immigration service providers. Last week, we coordinated a citywide day of action mobilizing volunteers across the boroughs to distribute educational materials, connecting with over 5,500 New Yorkers and ensuring that they are aware of their rights under our laws. This builds on our efforts over the past three years, conducting nearly 600 immigrant-focused outreach events to 63,000 New Yorkers on the protections and services we offer, regardless of immigration status.

Introduction 205

Turning to today's legislation, Introduction 205 would require DCWP to conduct outreach, education and advertising about fraudulent schemes committed by immigration service providers and how to avoid them. The advertisement requirements include television, internet, radio, print,

subway, and LinkNYC kiosks. The legislation would also require the agency to report annually on its outreach and advertising efforts.

We support the intent of this bill and are committed to sustainable interventions to help New Yorkers avoid common fraudulent schemes. However, we have concerns with the overly burdensome advertising mandates, which would require significant new resources. We look forward to working with Council on this legislation and ensuring that New Yorkers are equipped to avoid fraudulent schemes by bad actors.

Introduction 980

Next, Introduction 980 would increase civil penalties for immigration service providers for violations of DCWP's laws and rules. We support Introduction 980 and look forward to working with all of you on this bill.

Conclusion

I would like to reiterate that DCWP's protections and resources are available to all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status. Especially as it relates to the issues we are discussing today, we encourage anyone who has been harmed by fraud or misrepresentations to please contact our agency, so we can get to work assisting you. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on today's bills and our essential work uplifting all New Yorkers. We look forward to our continued partnership with all of you to protect our city's residents. I welcome any questions you may have for further discussion.