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Immigrant Affairs

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Testimony of Assistant Commissioner Bitta Mostofi

NYC Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs

NYC Council Committee on Immigration Hearing

Oversight – Supporting New York City's DREAMers and "DACA-mented" Youth

Thank you to Speaker Mark-Viverito, Chair Menchaca, and members of the Committee on Immigration. My name is Bitta Mostofi, and I am the Assistant Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

My testimony will provide an overview of the work MOIA has done under the leadership of Mayor de Blasio to support immigrant New Yorkers, and in particular DREAMers – those who have received, or are eligible to receive, immigration relief through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. Before I begin I should recognize the incredible partners who have helped to make this work possible: our colleagues across the Administration, community organizations and the Council, who have been critical partners in our work to support immigrant youth.

## **BACKGROUND**

Just last week we celebrated the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of President Obama's 2012 announcement that immigration relief would be available to immigrant youth across the country through DACA. DACA was designed to provide temporary protection from deportation, access to a work authorization and a Social Security number for young immigrants who came to the United States as children and want to contribute to their communities. DACA requires that applicants are in school, have graduated from high school, or served in the armed forces, and meet other eligibility rules.

The local impact of this program has been tremendous. In New York City alone we estimate that there are over 30,000 DACA recipients, with an estimated 55,000 more eligible. By receiving DACA, immigrant youth have greater opportunity to pursue educational and professional ambitions, as well as contribute to the economy. DACA holders are teachers, lawyers, and men and women in uniform. This temporary immigration relief has provided thousands with the opportunity to come out of the shadows, gain financial stability, and contribute to our local and national economies through taxes and higher wages. Revoking DACA would mean \$200 million in lost wages and \$6 million in lost taxes in New York City alone. We will continue to call on the new Administration in Washington, D.C. to provide affirmative confirmation of DACA's continuation, for the sake of our communities, economy, and so many NYC residents who have benefited from this truly life-changing program.

Today I will review the work of the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs to support DREAMers and advocate for NYC's immigrant youth. MOIA has made connection to immigration relief through DACA a priority through our programmatic; inter-agency; and outreach and advocacy work.

## **OUTREACH**

New York City is the ultimate city of immigrants, and that includes approximately 85,000 DACA holders and DACA-eligible youth. The Mayor's Office recognizes the transformative impact even temporary protection from deportation and access to work authorization can have on

a young person's life. We have reflected this through our range of work to help NYC youth learn about and realize DACA status.

In June 2014, MOIA proudly launched the first City advertising campaign in recent years geared towards immigrants – a DACA awareness campaign. To ensure the greatest reach and impact, MOIA and our partners considered potential barriers facing DACA-recipients, including lack of awareness of the program, access to information, and legal support. In developing the campaign concept, content, and in order to smartly target resources, MOIA analyzed data to identify current and DACA-eligible populations and held focus groups in collaboration with Make the Road New York and Asian Americans for Equality.

These conversations were incredibly valuable. Recommendations stemming from those focus groups impacted the messaging, design and dissemination of the campaign. For example, language was informed by feedback received, resulting in our campaign using the term “accion diferida” in Spanish, in addition to “DACA.” This multi-pronged, multi-language campaign consisted of ads in subways and bus stops, community and ethnic newspapers and radio, as well as information cards across City agencies, in schools, at consulates, and more.

Ads on subways and in bus shelters delivered more than 340 million impressions over eight weeks; and ads in community and ethnic media, including both print and radio, reached hundreds of thousands of readers and listeners. What's more, during the life of the campaign, MOIA's DACA website saw a 400 percent increase in visits.

In 2016, MOIA built on this work in partnership with the New York State Health Foundation by launching a major public education campaign to connect DACA recipients, and those eligible for DACA, to Medicaid and other benefits. This was the largest effort across the country to highlight low-income DACA recipients' potential eligibility for benefits such as Medicaid, and facilitate enrollment.

Again, through information sessions conducted in collaboration with community-based organizations, we learned that many DACA recipients were unfamiliar with basic information about the Medicaid program and Medicaid eligibility. We learned that our target population would benefit from clear information about what health insurance is available. The campaign's visuals were designed to reflect the diversity of DACA-eligible individuals, from parents to workers to college students. The campaign also included three short video testimonials for social media that feature DREAMers expressing the ways DACA and Medicaid changed their lives.

Additionally, MOIA has engaged in focused outreach to DACA-eligible New Yorkers and DACA recipients, including through our DACA+/DAPA Town Hall, co-sponsored with the Hispanic Federation, Make the Road New York and Telemundo. This event was followed by a weeklong telethon, geared towards answering caller questions about DACA. Throughout the campaign, volunteers fielded 1,000 calls.

## **INTER-AGENCY INITIATIVES**

MOIA regularly partners with City agencies to expand our reach to immigrant youth and ensure we smartly leverage connection-points with New Yorkers to highlight available services and resources.

To begin, our work with the Department of Education (DOE) has been extensive. DOE's Pathways to Graduation program has trained college and career staff on scholarship opportunities for DACA youth, and through the program has awarded 35 stipends for completed internships. The Department, with support from MOIA, has also conducted ongoing classroom-level outreach to inform students about legal service events and make in-house appointments, including over 137 free legal screenings for District 79 students wherein 67 percent of students qualified for immigration relief. Application assistance for DACA and DACA renewal were also provided to students in District 79.

Through ActionNYC, in partnership with Fordham Law, MOIA has also provided Know Your Rights workshops in schools for over 1,000 students citywide. The program has worked with high-need schools, including Community Schools that serve as hubs for education and social services; International Schools that have a foreign-born population of over 90 percent; and District 79 schools serving older immigrant students ages 17-21.

Beyond our work to connect eligible New Yorkers to benefits through DACA, MOIA's outreach efforts in support of the IDNYC program have included a particular focus on the young adult population – including immigrant youth and their families.

One month after the launch of the IDNYC program, the City opened a location at La Guardia Community College. The site was so successful that we stayed until December, 2016. During our time at La Guardia Community College our teams enrolled over 33,000 New Yorkers for their official ID card.

Additionally, through our ongoing partnership with the City University of New York (CUNY), MOIA promoted student IDNYC enrollment by hosting a series of pop-up enrollment sites at college campuses including Brooklyn College, Hunter College, Borough of Manhattan Community College, Queensborough Community College, and Kingsborough College. Through these pop-ups, our teams enrolled nearly 3,000 students and staff. As part of this engagement, IDNYC brought together over 30 CUNY Student Government leaders from several campuses for an event at BMCC to join in promoting IDNYC to their fellow students.

Partnerships have been key to IDNYC engagement. Working closely with the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) and the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), we have targeted outreach to youth through DYCD's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) – the largest youth workforce initiative of its kind in the country – and through other community-based school and youth programs. Specifically, IDNYC partnered with DYCD to deliver information to SYEP youth through multiple channels, such as digital materials, at the program's orientation and at job placement sites.

Through IDNYC we have also worked with the DOE to engage with public school students and parents. DOE has been a consistent partner, regularly issuing guidance and information on IDNYC to all staff and principals. Since the launch of the program, IDNYC has partnered with Pathways to Graduation to facilitate streamlined bulk enrollments and in September, 2016,

IDNYC and DOE collaborated to launch on-site enrollment in high schools. This series of pop-ups were sited at Fort Hamilton High School, Fiorello H. LaGuardia High School of Music & Art and Performing Arts, George Washington Educational Campus, Francis Lewis High School, Fort Hamilton High School, Edward R. Murrow High School, and Stuyvesant High School. Additionally, IDNYC sent brochures home with all 1.1 million DOE students, and all Universal Pre-K (UPK) schools distributed IDNYC informational materials to parents. In the course of this work, we have engaged over 100 DOE Parent Coordinators as well.

Finally, when children in foster care have DACA or any other immigration legal need, ACS partners with immigration legal service providers such as The Door, Legal Aid, Sanctuary for Families, and others for consultations and representation.

The wide-ranging work of the Mayor's Office, City agencies, and our partners to connect immigrant youth to services would not be complete without our cornerstone legal services program: ActionNYC.

### **ACTIONNYC AND CITIES FOR ACTION**

In 2015, heralding President Obama's 2014 Executive Actions on immigration, Mayor de Blasio and Speaker Mark-Viverito announced the creation of ActionNYC, representing the nation's largest investment by a municipality to prepare for Executive Action. ActionNYC is the first model of its size to connect outreach, community navigation and legal support.

In further support of Executive Action, MOIA has helped lead Cities for Action – a national coalition of over 150 Mayors and county leaders – in aggressive advocacy, penning letters to the Supreme Court of the United States urging them to review the appeal for *Texas v. U.S.*

The coalition filed amicus briefs in support of President Obama's Executive Actions on immigration on multiple occasions: in January 2015 to the Supreme Court, alongside 120 Mayors; in January 23, 2015 to the district court, alongside 33 Mayors; and in April 2015 to the 5<sup>th</sup> circuit, alongside 73 Mayors. The coalition also urged President Obama to take additional steps to support DACA recipients as the end of his Administration neared.

While we were ultimately disappointed in the Supreme Court's decision on Executive Action, ActionNYC moved forward to ensure that immigrant New Yorkers, including those who are DACA-eligible and other immigrant youth, have access to free, safe immigration legal help. In particular, ActionNYC began a strategic partnership with DOE to provide legal services directly in schools.

Partnering with schools has allowed ActionNYC to reach students and parents in a safe and familiar setting. Since launch in March 2016, ActionNYC has offered 86 legal clinics at over 25 unique schools, serving over 900 individuals. ActionNYC has also made 87 referrals for City and social services, including IDNYC, healthcare enrollment, and English language classes. Approximately three out of ten individuals screened was found to have an immigration benefit available. In addition, a preliminary analysis in April showed that at least 80 percent of those screened at schools have stated that it was the first time they were accessing free, immigration legal services.

## **THE WORK AHEAD**

In the face of uncertainty around the future of the DACA program and growing enforcement initiatives by federal immigration authorities, Mayor de Blasio has made a firm call to Washington, D.C. to affirm the program will be preserved for the 30,000 New Yorkers with DACA and the approximately 750,000 nationwide.

Additionally, in response to shifts in immigration policy and enforcement at the national level, ActionNYC has pivoted its outreach model and has increased the scale of regular Know Your Rights forums. Organizers have participated in nearly 400 community workshops. In addition, as mentioned, ActionNYC in Schools has partnered with Fordham Law School to deliver nearly 100 Know Your Rights Workshops in 33 schools from January through May 2017, reaching 2,488 attendees.

MOIA recently announced an expansion of ActionNYC in NYC Health + Hospitals facilities, with the opening of three new ActionNYC sites in NYC Health + Hospitals facilities in Queens, Lower Manhattan and the Bronx. These sites will provide immigration legal services and facilitate connections to health insurance and health care for NYC Health + Hospitals patients and community members, including DACA-eligible youth.

Further, MOIA has been in close conversations with private funders to serve as a citywide Know Your Rights coordinator, ensuring effective and strategic delivery of rights information and legal services referrals to immigrant communities, in collaboration with community-based organizations, City agencies, and legal service providers.

We will continue to work with partners in our national coalition Cities for Action to fight for the continuation of DACA, which has allowed approximately 750,000 residents to come out of the shadows. Our coalition urges the President to explicitly commit to continuing the program and building on its success.

## **CONCLUSION**

We recognize that despite recent indications from the federal government that DACA will continue, this is not enough. We will continue to monitor federal policy changes, and ensure that the immigrant communities we are here to serve, our colleagues and our partners have trusted and reliable information. We continue our call to the Administration give DREAMers the peace of mind they deserve, and commit to protecting these young people through DACA, and by supporting legislation to provide them with permanent relief

We look forward to continuing this conversation with the Council in the coming weeks, and working with the Council and Agency partners, advocates and others to do this important work.