



Mayor's Office of
Immigrant Affairs

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May 30, 2018

Dear Human Rights Watch:

We deeply appreciate your work championing human rights and your commitment to fighting for fairness and equity for all. At the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, we share these goals. We are committed to empowering as many immigrant New Yorkers as possible to put up the strongest fight they can to stay in the city they call home. The de Blasio Administration is proud to have committed the largest local investment in civil legal services funding of any municipality in the nation, and of our work alongside key community partners and legal services providers to bring much-needed legal support to New Yorkers at a time of immense need.

Our local laws and policies reflect our commitment to keeping NYC a city of immigrants. We support a range of programs on the local level to help immigrant New Yorkers thrive, and have strong local laws limiting cooperation with federal immigration enforcement to only those who pose a risk to public safety. If an individual in NYPD or DOC custody has been convicted of a serious or violent felony within the last five years or is on the terrorist watch list, we will cooperate with federal authorities on their removal. For the vast majority of immigrant New Yorkers, who do not have a recent conviction for a serious or violent felony, the City provides access to free legal assistance programs to provide advice, advocacy, support and representation to defend against the threat of removal or secure their immigration status.

We are in a time when the federal government has dramatically broadened the core targets of immigration enforcement, increasingly focusing efforts on *all* immigrants in our communities. Further, the federal government's failure to provide immigrants with counsel in federal immigration court leaves a tremendous gap in legal representation for families fighting to stay in their homes. The de Blasio Administration is responding on a local level to help keep families together. With a commitment of over \$30 million this year, the Administration is working to ensure that thousands of New Yorkers at risk of deportation have access to legal services. These dollars will dramatically increase the availability of legal assistance for immigrant New Yorkers, securing legal services for thousands of residents – including asylees, Dreamers, and those facing deportation and other pressing immigration challenges.

Even with this tremendous local investment, funding for immigration-related legal services does not nearly approach the total funding that would be required to provide truly universal representation for immigrants in New York City, and so the City must prioritize in some fashion the cases in which its funding for services will be provided. These parameters ensure that the vast majority of immigrant New Yorkers are able to seek legal help through City-funded programs. It is also important to recognize that New York City's extraordinary investment in



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immigration legal assistance is not the sole source of funding for these services; private philanthropies and other sources are also part of the local landscape of support for immigration legal services in New York City.

During this time of increased enforcement by federal immigration authorities, particularly impacting immigrants with no criminal history, we are intimately aware of the tremendous fear within immigrant communities. As a result, we have ramped up outreach efforts to ensure that our residents have accurate information and are aware of the resources available to them, regardless of immigration status. Our full-time outreach team meets with immigrant-serving organizations and community leaders across the five boroughs, and we have hosted nearly 1,500 Know Your Rights forums for immigrant New Yorkers since the beginning of 2017.

We are immensely proud that through our ActionNYC program, any New Yorker with immigration legal questions can receive a free, confidential legal screening. As a practicing immigration lawyer for over a decade, I know that in order to understand and route an individual client's case, an immigration attorney must first undertake an initial screening. In an initial screening, providers ask clients for information like where they live and their criminal history. This is the same information that providers must obtain today in order to assess whether a client can receive City-funded services.

While the parameters of the programming were carefully discussed and set during last year's City budget discussions, the Mayor's Office is open to continued conversation so that government can continue to reflect on the best models of service delivery and maintain an ongoing dialogue with legal providers, stakeholders, and residents.

Thank you again for your thoughtful correspondence and we look forward to continuing to work with passionate community leaders like Human Rights Watch to better our city.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bitta Mostofi".

Bitta Mostofi

Commissioner, Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs