



New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy

New York City Council
Committee on Immigration
Honorable Carlos Menchaca, Chair

Testimony of New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy
Presented by Sasha Kesler, UJA-Federation

Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 28, 2016

Thank you to Council Member Menchaca for your leadership in holding this inaugural Preliminary Budget Hearing on Immigration. My name is Sasha Kesler, Government Relations Associate at UJA-Federation, and I will be testifying on behalf of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy today.

The New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy is comprised of adult literacy teachers, managers, students, and allies from over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across NYC. NYCCAL advocates for an adult literacy system that provides quality, comprehensive and accessible educational services to the over 1.7 million adults (aged 18-64) in NYC who need them. We believe that being able to read and write, learn English, obtain a High School Equivalency, and enter training and post-secondary education is the right of every New Yorker, and the cornerstone to an equitable and just society.

Immigrants are integral to the overall social and economic fabric of New York City.

- In 2013, New York City immigrants accounted for 37% of the population, 43% of the workforce, and generated \$257 billion in economic activity (1/3 of the city's gross product).¹
- A mother's literacy level is the greatest predictor of a child's academic achievement.²
- Patients with low literacy skills have a 50% increased risk of hospitalization.³
- For every NYC resident that earns a high school diploma or its equivalent (HSE), there is a net benefit to the City of \$324,000 over their lifetime in terms of increased tax contributions and decreased public benefit utilization.⁴

¹<https://osc.state.ny.us/osdc/rpt7-2016.pdf> (DiNapoli, 2015)

²<http://www.nih.gov/news-events/news-releases/improving-mothers-literacy-skills-may-be-best-way-boost-childrens-achievement> (National Institutes of Health, 2010)

³<http://www.proliteracy.org/the-crisis/the-us-crisis>

⁴<http://www.cssny.org/publications/entry/from-basic-skills-to-better-futuresSept2009> (Community Service Society, 2009)



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- English literacy and basic adult education serves as the key link to help immigrants obtain quality and sustainable employment, support their children in succeeding academically, manage their health, and to promote upward mobility.

There are over 1.7 million New Yorker City residents lacking a high school diploma, English proficiency or both.⁵ Currently, there are only 61,000 classroom seats to address this drastic need for literacy services.⁶ Providing a classroom seat to every New York City resident who needs basic adult literacy services would require a \$2.04 billion investment. In order to begin meeting a greater proportion of the need, we recommend the following:

\$16 Million Investment in Adult Literacy Services

We recommend that the Administration baseline \$16 million to support 13,300 students in adult literacy programs including English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Basic Education in Native Language (BENL), Adult Basic Education (ABE), and High School Equivalency preparation (HSE). This investment will restore the 6,300 classroom seats lost at the conclusion of the DACA Initiative and invest in 7,000 additional new seats, half of the current 14,000-person waitlist. According to a report conducted by the Center for an Urban Future, New York State's immigrant population grew by 386,000 people between 2005 and 2013, but during these eight years, state-funded ESOL seats have declined by 32%. Less than 3% of eligible New Yorkers were served. This investment will help to reach the goal of universal adult literacy.

Inclusion of Comprehensive Bridge Programming in Career Pathways

At the end of February, HRA released three workforce development Requests for Proposal, intended to redesign the workforce development system in New York City. NYCCAL is grateful for the efforts of HRA and the Administration in prioritizing comprehensive workforce development services. However, we are concerned that the *Career Bridge* RFP was subsumed within the other three RFPs and the total funding for bridge programming was cut by \$6 million. *Career Bridge* was originally intended to serve nearly 6,500 individuals through up to 27 contracts to provide the following services: English as a Second Language (ESL), Bridge Training, Basic Education and High School Equivalency and Vocational Training. We are concerned that the elimination of the *Career Bridge* RFP may negatively impact the provision of these vital services.

Expanding the ActionNYC Adult Education Initiative RFP

The ActionNYC Adult Education Initiative Concept Paper proposes funding "one part-time teacher at each of eight DACA Education Initiative sites" (p.5). This proposal assumes that all DACA eligible individual have the same literacy, workforce, and schedule needs. NYCCAL recommends that MOIA consider the following factors when developing the final RFP:

⁵ Migration Policy Institute tabulation of data from the U.S. census Bureau's pooled 2009-2011 American Community Surveys

⁶ Career Pathways



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Scheduling: In choosing to fund “an intensive evening program,” the Concept Paper assumes that the only reason individuals have been unable to obtain the educational requirement is due to conflict with existing employment obligation. Evening classes may exclude parents, particularly working mothers, from participating. In addition, the model assumes that students are able to start and complete the classes at the times when offered. It is essential to provide a wide-variety of class times and schedule in order to meet the needs of students.

Literacy Level: By allocating funding for three class terms, the Concept Paper assumes that all students have the same educational needs and background. While some students may have a high-school education in their native language, others may be at a low literacy level that requires basic skills. It is essential to provide students with classes that are appropriate for their education and literacy level.

Stigmatization: We are concerned that separating DACA eligible students from the general adult literacy population will stigmatize students, who may already be wary of government-funded programs, due to their legal status.

Class Location: The Concept Paper states, “[Providers] will partner with existing educational programs within or geographically close to the 8 ActionNYC navigation sites” (p. 4). By requiring that providers be in the physical proximity of pre-selected ActionNYC Navigation sites, the geographic scope of the RFP will be limited and the RFP will exclude adult literacy providers that are already supporting immigrant students with culturally-competent programming and limit the potential clientele from participating due to travel distances.

This Administration has taken incredible leadership in expanding the opportunities for immigrants. In order to build on this legacy, we believe it is essential to invest in critical adult literacy services that serve as the gateway to future social and economic success. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and we look forward to continuing to work in collaboration and partnership.