



# New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy

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

**Preliminary Budget Hearing  
March 22, 2017**

**Testimony of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy  
Presented by Ira Yankwitt, Literacy Assistance Center**

Good afternoon. Thank you Council Member Menchaca and members of the New York City Council Committee on Immigration for the opportunity to testify. My name is Ira Yankwitt and I am the Executive Director of the Literacy Assistance Center, a 33-year-old nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening and expanding the adult education system, and advancing adult literacy as a core value in our society. Today I will be testifying on behalf of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy, or NYCCAL, a coalition comprised of adult literacy teachers, program managers, students, and allies from over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across the five boroughs. NYCCAL advocates for an adult literacy system that provides quality, comprehensive, and accessible educational services for the 2.2 million adults in NYC who lack English language proficiency, basic literacy skills, or a high school diploma. We believe that being able to read and write, learn English, obtain an equivalency diploma, and successfully enter job training or post-secondary education are the rights of every New Yorker, and cornerstones of an equitable and just society.

First and foremost, NYCCAL wishes to thank you Council Member Menchaca for your steadfast leadership on this issue, and wishes to express our deep appreciation to the City Council and the Mayor for the historic, \$12 million expansion of adult literacy funding and services this past year. At a time when the Trump administration is targeting – and, indeed,

terrorizing – immigrant communities, adult literacy programs in NYC are serving as a refuge and a lifeline, providing immigrant students with critical information on their rights, strategies to protect themselves and their families, access to counseling and legal services, as well as the language and literacy skills needed to support their children in school, navigate the healthcare system, achieve economic security and, perhaps most significantly at this moment, advocate for themselves and tell their stories.

In a sanctuary city committed to immigrant rights, justice, and opportunity, failing to renew this funding and closing down English language and literacy classes for the thousands of adults who would benefit from them would be an abandonment of those who are most vulnerable. But we at NYCCAL are hopeful that this Council, this Mayor, and this city will embrace all immigrant New Yorkers, and not only reaffirm the commitment from last year but make an even stronger statement of solidarity and support. To that end, NYCCAL proposes that the City Council and the Mayor take two major steps in Fiscal Year 2018 to fortify and expand adult literacy services:

1) Baseline the \$12 million investment for community-based adult literacy programs.

- Use \$5.7 million of this funding to continue the FY 2017 contract modifications and discretionary awards, and \$300,000 for technical assistance.
- Have DYCD draft a new literacy RFP with a contract start date of January 1, 2018, and use the remaining \$6 million to cover the awards for the first six months of those contracts, from January 2018 to June 2018.
- Moreover, to insure that programs have the resources and funding they need to provide the highest level of services to their students, the RFP should reflect the program features and reimbursement rates described in the *Elements of a Quality Adult Literacy Program* document that is currently being developed by the Literacy Assistance Center through funding from DYCD.

2) Launch a NYC Adult Literacy Task Force through the Mayor's Office

- This task force would bring together multiple stakeholders to examine the current adult literacy system and develop recommendations for building a high-quality, well-coordinated, comprehensive system that advances equity and opportunity for all New Yorkers.

- The task force would include representatives from the Mayor's Office, City Council, DYCD, CUNY, Department of Education, MOIA, HRA, the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development, library branches, CBO providers, researchers, advocates and other adult literacy experts.

Baselining the \$12 million and creating an Adult Literacy Task Force in FY 2018 would go a long way to building the capacity, sustainability, and effectiveness of the system. These two proposals are part of a larger three year vision developed by NYCCAL and outlined in the one of the documents that we've submitted along with this testimony, and we would be happy to discuss our vision further.

Currently, only 61,000 adults in NYC are served through publicly funded adult literacy programs. This is barely 3% of the 2.2 million adults in need, and many of the current classes are at risk of being eliminated as a result of federal budget cuts. This is a city that has resoundingly declared that when immigrants are under attack, we as a city will stand up and fight back. Continuing to provide immigrant New Yorkers with the language and literacy skills they need to fight for themselves and their families is one of the strongest statements this City Council and Mayor can make in the name of resistance, equal opportunity, and social justice.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.