

**New York Immigration Coalition Questionnaire for 2009 Mayoral Candidates:  
Response of Bill Thompson**

1. **Generally. What is your greatest accomplishment that has helped immigrants, and what are your top policy priorities for immigrant communities if you are elected mayor?**

I am particularly proud of a report I issued finding that immigrants face major language barriers at New York City hospitals. My report found that New Yorkers whose primary language is not English encounter significant barriers navigating the City's complicated health care system—with nearly 75 percent of hospitals surveyed failing to provide Spanish-language services to callers to one or more departments. My efforts led to "Patients Rights" regulations being revised to require hospitals to provide language access services in all departments that routinely interact with the public.

Also, as Mayor, one of my top priorities for our immigrant communities will be to increase our City's dwindling stock of affordable housing. Before Mike Bloomberg took office, affordable housing was the gateway to our City for many immigrants. Sadly, this gateway is rapidly closing, as housing prices and rents soar out of control.

2. **Drop-Out Crisis. English language learners in our public schools have one of the highest dropout rates in New York City schools. What concrete steps will you take to increase the graduation rates and decrease the dropout rates of these most vulnerable students?**

The New York City public schools have failed to invest in English Language Learners. The system's nearly 150,000 ELLs face huge obstacles to academic success. They must not only learn a new language, but they must also adjust to a new country and schools while trying to meet promotion and graduation standards.

The graduation rate for ELL students has remained stagnant during the last four years, and the gap between ELLs and English proficient students remains wide. The achievement gap is most pronounced at the 8th grade reading level, where only 5 percent of ELL students achieved learning standards as compared with nearly half of non-ELL students.

As Mayor I will refocus efforts on educating ELL students and invest in their futures. I will dedicate funding, provide the necessary supports to prevent dropouts, and recruit and train qualified teachers to increase the number of programs available to students.

3. **English Classes. Learning English is key to surviving and succeeding in our City. Many programs that offer affordable adult English classes have suffered drastic cuts, however, making long waiting lists for these classes even longer. What will you do to increase the availability of free and low-cost adult English classes for immigrant communities?**

As Comptroller, I evaluated the state of adult English classes in New York City and proposed significant changes to ensure that they better serve New Yorkers. It is essential that adult English classes are widely accessible—for both Citywide workplace development and the advancement of immigrant communities. In 2008, my office found that workforce development training efforts are not well integrated across agencies that separately provide training services.

I will establish a Mayor's Office for Skills Education to centralize the responsibility for the City's workplace development programs, including English classes for adults. This will create greater communication and coordination between agencies, while ensuring that there is appropriate oversight of the costs and availability of classes. I will also lobby to increase federal funding for adult English classes—along with other workplace training and development programs—under the Workforce Investment Act and the Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act.

4. **Legal Services. A shortage of quality, affordable immigration legal services is one of the most pressing concerns in immigrant communities. It gives rise to scam artists who prey on the**

**community. To address this shortage, will you commit additional funding to support non-profit community-based legal service providers? How much of a funding increase will you propose?**

I have consistently worked with immigrant communities to provide access to legal information, and am deeply aware of the need for trustworthy and skilled legal service providers.

As Comptroller, I helped fill this void in a number of ways. I worked with community, immigrant, and worker advocacy groups to launch an aggressive immigrant outreach initiative ensuring that contractors doing business with the City do not exploit workers by ignoring prevailing wage and living wage laws. I also undertook a major outreach effort to educate workers hired under Public Works' Contracts regarding their rights under the State's prevailing wage laws and informed workers of the minimum hourly wage that workers should receive in a variety of fields.

My office also successfully prosecuted many companies and individuals under the City's prevailing wage laws, recovering more than \$12 million for workers who were illegally underpaid by New York City contractors.

5. **Worker Centers. In these tough economic times, more New Yorkers are heading to street corners in search of work, making the need for worker hiring centers greater than ever. Will your administration support or contribute to the creation of worker centers that provide job training, safety training, and a more organized way for workers and employers to come together?**

Yes, I strongly support the creation of worker centers. In 2008, my office issued a policy report regarding the City's disjointed workforce development programs, which are inappropriately dispersed over thirty-three programs, nine departments, and three Deputy Mayors. Many job-seekers require additional language services and education, and our City's English Language Learners have been woefully underserved by the current administration.

As Mayor, I will coordinate both adult English classes and workforce development under a new Mayor's Office of Skills Education. With additional coordination and outreach, the City's existing Workforce1 career centers can serve both the short- and long-term needs of all New Yorkers seeking jobs, career training, and English classes. By centralizing, coordinating, and raising awareness about our City's workforce development programs and English language programs, Workforce1 centers can be overhauled to provide truly one-stop support for New Yorkers seeking job training and employment opportunities.

6. **Police Relations. Many immigrants feel they are victims of racial profiling and harassment by the police. What steps will you take to address these concerns and to improve community-police relations in immigrant communities?**

I was troubled by reports that the NYPD made 311,000 stop and frisks in the first half of this year—more than 90 percent of which targeted Black and Latino individuals. In addition, the NYPD Commissioner said recently that the City anticipates stopping as many as 600,000 people this year. About 10 percent are arrested.

As Mayor, I will undertake a thorough and careful analysis of the NYPD's stop and frisk procedures to ensure that this anti-crime technique is used when necessary—but not overused—and that the civil rights of all New Yorkers are respected and upheld.

I will also ensure that boroughs outside of Manhattan receive their fair share of police resources.

7. **Immigration Enforcement. For years, federal immigration agents have been stationed at Rikers Island, where they are given access to detainees and can begin the process of deportation, even though most detainees have not even had their day in court. As a result, thousands of New Yorkers are deported every year, regardless of whether they are found innocent or guilty. Will**

**you end the City's participation in the federal immigration enforcement program at Department of Corrections facilities?**

Denying federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents access to pre-trial Rikers inmates makes sense given the difficult burdens placed on otherwise law-abiding undocumented immigrants—who make up a substantial portion of the City's families and workforce.

The expense shouldered by City agencies—and the emotional trauma endured by New York City families dealing with the deportation of an innocent person—should not continue to satisfy demands on our federal government.

**8. Immigration Reform. What specific actions will you take as mayor to fight for federal immigration reform on behalf of immigrant communities in New York City?**

There would be no New York without our thriving immigrant population, who literally built our City from the ground up.

That's why, as New York City Comptroller, I supported immigration reform that would provide undocumented immigrants with a pathway to citizenship.

I strongly opposed federal efforts in 2007 to make an immigrant's undocumented presence in the United States a crime.

And I aggressively resisted fear and intimidation tactics used by certain State and Federal agencies against immigrant workers. I spoke out loudly in opposition to an ICE audit of Fresh Direct's employment documentation at its warehouse in Long Island City, Queens, which appeared to be an attempt to interfere in a legal labor dispute.

**9. Health Care Access. Hospitals and clinics have closed throughout New York City, exacerbating the shortage of primary health care facilities in our most vulnerable neighborhoods, and putting even more pressure on nearby hospitals. Moreover, national health reform will exclude hundreds of thousands of immigrant New Yorkers, who will have to continue to rely on the safety-net health care system. What will you do to make health care more accessible to immigrant communities, and how will you ensure adequate support for safety-net facilities in New York City?**

As Mayor, I will seek out innovative ways to expand existing primary care capacity.

I will use public-private partnerships to leverage private investment in primary care. Investing public funds in partnerships like the Primary Care Development Corporation (PCDC) could leverage the private capital needed to construct these needed primary care facilities.

I will help primary care clinics become Federally-Qualified Health Centers (FQHC). FQHCs are widely recognized as offering high-quality care to the poor. They receive subsidies in exchange for providing comprehensive primary care services, treating anyone regardless of inability to pay.

And I will revisit the restrictions that the City has placed on the use of capital dollars for construction of primary care facilities. These limitations should be reviewed and reassessed as a means to fund new clinics.

I have many more innovative ideas in my new health care plan, which is available on my website: [www.thompson2009.com](http://www.thompson2009.com).

**10. Parent Engagement. Many parents are frustrated that the school system does not respond to or effectively resolve issues they raise with the school or the Department of Education. How will you improve the way parents' concerns are addressed, and how will you expand avenues for**

## **meaningful parent engagement?**

As Mayor, I will create the City's first ever Parent University. The City of Philadelphia has successfully launched a similar program to assist parents and guardians in support of their children's academic achievement.

To further support parents, I will also provide parents with a meaningful role on the Panel for Education Policy, or PEP, by including parent-nominated members on that body.

Finally, at the school level, I will restore authority to school leadership teams. These teams, made up of parents and school staff, will have the authority to develop school budgets and comprehensive education plans that were stripped away from them by the current administration.

### **11. Affordable Housing. New York City continues to face an affordable housing crisis. What is your plan for creating *permanent* affordable housing in the City (that is, affordable units that do not expire)? Do you support policies that would mandate public and private developers to include affordable units in their projects (in contrast to voluntary incentives such as tax breaks)?**

Yes, I strongly support policies that mandate public and private developers to include affordable units in their projects.

I have released a comprehensive affordable housing plan on my website that will open up our City to immigrants, and preserve and create housing for millions of New Yorkers.

A big part of my plan will be reversing Mike Bloomberg's aggressive hikes on rent regulated apartments. Since Republican Mike Bloomberg took office, his appointees have voted for rent increases totaling 31 percent.

As Mayor, I will appoint public members who understand that it is their responsibility to keep rents affordable. They will take into account not only owners' costs and expenses but tenants' incomes. I will also fight in Albany for legislation that places under rent stabilization all post-1973 Mitchell-Lama housing developments that left or will leave the program, regardless of when constructed or first occupied.

### **Asthma. New York City has one of the highest asthma rates in the country. Studies show a correlation between poor housing conditions and asthma prevalence. In light of this, do you support legislation such as Intro 750, The Asthma-Free Housing Act, which seeks to reduce asthma triggers (such as mold, roaches, and rats) by strengthen housing code enforcement against such triggers?**

Yes, I support legislation such as Intro 750.

In 2007, I found that disparities in hospitalization and mortality rates based on income widened for heart disease, cancer, and diabetes from 1990 to 2005. I also revealed that in the case of asthma—while hospitalizations have decreased due to better management of the disease—the prevalence of this disease as it affects children remains persistently high in many low-income neighborhoods.

As Mayor, I will address these continuing disparities by increasing the availability and utilization of primary and preventive care. I will also supplement existing primary and preventive care by opening clinics in drug stores, supermarkets, and "big box" stores that are directly accessible to residents of low-income neighborhoods.

Several drug store clinics are currently partnering with area hospitals, and as Mayor, I will expand these partnerships.