A BUDGET FOR THE CITY OF IMMIGRANTS:
Key Proposals to Ensure NYC’s 2016 Budget Responds to the Needs of Immigrant Residents

June 2015
Executive Summary

New York City’s (NYC) annual budget process offers an opportunity for city government to demonstrate its priorities and how it will devote resources to myriad types of programs and services. By early June, the Mayor and City Council are expected to conclude this process, which will include key decisions on issues including school funding, policing, and affordable housing. As elected officials move forward in this process, it is critical that they heed the rights and needs of immigrant New Yorkers, who are at the center of our vibrant and productive city.

Citywide, immigrants represent 37 percent of the population, 45 percent of the workforce, and 49 percent of small business owners.¹ This report from Make the Road New York (MRNY) and the New York Immigration Coalition (NYIC) highlights a broad range of budget priorities for working-class immigrant New Yorkers, all of which come from deep engagement in immigrant communities across NYC.² The list is not exhaustive, but rather highlights a series of top-priority items for New York’s immigrant communities, to which Mayor de Blasio, Speaker Mark-Viverito, and the members of the City Council should give careful consideration. Already, Speaker Mark-Viverito and the Council have issued their budget response, which includes important initiatives for immigrant New Yorkers. Building on that foundation, all those involved in the NYC budget process should now look closely at the proposals below and make the important adjustments needed to ensure that the final budget includes as many elements to benefit immigrant communities as possible.
Key Proposals for a 2016 Budget for the City of Immigrants

Immigrant Services
• Provide $9 million for a citywide administrative relief program capable of outreach to hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers and fully preparing over 37,000 potentially eligible New Yorkers to apply;
• Maintain critical investments made to DACA legal, literacy, and outreach services through the 2013 DACA Initiative, including investing and base-lining $7.5 million in funding for adult literacy for immigrants and other adults who need to improve their skills to be able to access better jobs and support their families.
• Renew the City Council’s Adult Literacy Initiative and expand it from $750,000 to $5 million;
• Renew and base-line funding for the NYIFUP at $4.9 million to allow its success to continue and strengthen;
• Fund and base-line $4 million to continue to support legal services to unaccompanied minors facing deportation;
• Create an additional funding stream to provide free and high quality legal counsel to all immigrants in NYC immigration courts;
• Include $1 million to fund specialized LGBTQ immigration services via local organizations citywide; and
• Maintain funding levels for the municipal ID (IDNYC) program implementation to continue meeting demand and providing high quality service citywide.

Strong Workforce
• Provide resources to ensure that sanctions are effectively meted out to unscrupulous carwash owners who do not comply with the law;
• Restore Human Rights Commission funding to $5 million;
• Include sufficient resources for DCA to be able to enforce workers’ rights on paid sick days and other related initiatives;
• Invest $1 million toward employment legal services for immigrants;
• Strengthen the existing day laborer center network by committing to base-line $365,000 in the budget;
• Renew funding of $5.5 million for the Jobs to Build On initiative;
• Allocate $2.34 million to enhance the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative; and
• Increase funding in social service contracts to establish an $11.50/hour wage floor for nonprofit sector workers, provide a meaningful COLA for all social service workers, and invest $5 million to develop a career ladder system for this workforce.

Policing and Restorative Justice
• Fully fund the Summer Youth Employment Program, which would require an additional $21.5 million to reach 50,000 employed youth and $100 million to reach full youth employment;
• Implement a citywide Restorative Justice Coordinator Program, at a cost of $89.95 million for 514 schools; and
• Expand funding to Student Success Centers in NYC to $500,000 across ten schools.

Affordable and Safe Housing
• Allocate sufficient resources to ensure that new housing developments include 50 percent affordable units, and that a substantial portion of these units be affordable to low-income tenants (with as low as 30 percent of Area Median Income);
• Guarantee a right to counsel for all New York tenants by allocating approximately $300 million for this purpose;
• Deliver on its promise of a $36 million anti-displacement legal services effort, $5 million for community organizing efforts, and expand both in proportion with new rezoning announcements;
• Allocate $13.5 million for anti-displacement efforts in areas affected by prior rezonings;
• Maintain the current funding levels of the Housing Preservation Initiative (HPI);
• Fund the Alternative Enforcement Program at a level that enables it to continue to cover 250 buildings;
• Increase funding for the Emergency Repair Program initiative to ensure effective citywide enforcement; and
• Allocate resources to focus greater enforcement attention for repair of dangerous asthma-triggering underlying conditions within residents’ homes.

Education
• Provide funds to create 128 community schools and include $40 million for expanded learning time and summer programs, $5 million for parent engagement and $20 million for teams of expert teachers and principals in the lowest-performing schools;
• Fully fund the creation of all of the 49,000 needed school seats citywide to combat overcrowding and allocate resources to create and coordinate a task force to address this major problem;
• Create a $5 million Parent Engagement Innovation Fund to pilot national models for parent engagement;
• Include new language access funding for Language Line and outreach; and
• Expand NYC’s free school lunch program to all public school students.

Access to Health Care
• Allocate $5 million for the Access Health NYC Initiative.

Civic Engagement
• Invest $1 million to engage, educate, activate, and mobilize 75,000 immigrant residents to register to vote and be part of their community’s civic fabric; and
• Allocate $500,000 to engage immigrant communities in participatory budgeting.
1. Introduction

Immigrants have for centuries been a crucial part of New York City’s (NYC) history. Today, immigrants from around the world remain responsible for a substantial portion of the city’s cultural, economic, and political vibrancy. Immigrants make up 37 percent of the city’s population, 45 percent of the labor force, and 49 percent of business owners. And immigrants contribute strongly to the city’s global identity and cultural mosaic, as anyone who visits the diverse neighborhoods across the five boroughs can attest.

While NYC has taken tremendous strides to improve services for immigrants—including language assistance provision, universal pre-K, and the municipal identification card (IDNYC)—it remains vital that NYC’s annual budget process reflect immigrant New Yorkers’ priorities. This report outlines top priorities for immigrant New Yorkers in NYC’s 2016 budget across various issue areas: Immigration Services, Strong Workforce, Policing and Restorative Justice, Education, Housing, Health, and Civic Engagement.

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<th>Table 1: Statistics About Immigrant NYC Residents</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Immigrant NYC Residents</td>
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<td>Immigrants as a Percentage of the NYC Population</td>
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<td>Percentage of NY Workforce who are Immigrants</td>
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<td>Percentage of NY Small Business Owners who are Immigrants</td>
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2. Immigrant Services

Immigrant New Yorkers continue to lack adequate access to vital services, including competent legal representation and English language and adult education classes. These deficiencies were particularly highlighted when the Obama Administration’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) offered the possibility of work authorization and protection from deportation. Encouraging eligible candidates from New York’s tremendously diverse array of immigrant communities to apply for DACA status and helping them through the process requires that intermediary groups rooted in the communities have an expanded capacity to serve each community’s legal and educational needs. Following President Obama’s administrative relief announcement last November, the prospect of an expanded DACA program, as well as the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (DAPA) program for the parents of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents, only further underscores the need for groups that serve the needs of these communities to have adequate funding. Together, existing DACA, expanded DACA, and DAPA could benefit approximately 230,000 people eligible in New York City, nearly half of the estimated undocumented population.

While NYC works to address the incredible demand of these programs, we must continue to strengthen the capacity of groups providing legal counsel, English language and adult education classes – all of which are ongoing and basic needs for underserved immigrant communities. Meeting them adequately would be a benefit both to immigrant communities and to the city as a whole, allowing immigrants to more fully participate in city life in numerous ways. NYC has been a trailblazer in creating initiatives and programs for immigrants, such as the nation’s largest municipal ID program (“IDNYC”). Now NYC must continue on this path and expand services to immigrants.

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<th>Table 2: DACA and DAPA Eligibility</th>
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<td>Undocumented Immigrants in NYC</td>
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<td>Undocumented Immigrants Eligible for DACA, Expanded DACA, or DAPA</td>
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First, NYC must respond to the critical moment of executive action. Approximately 230,000 immigrant New Yorkers are potentially eligible for the expanded Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) programs announced by President Obama. While a lawsuit has delayed implementation, it has not stopped the need to continue to prepare New York’s immigrant communities. Immediate support is needed to ensure that potential applicants are adequately prepared as soon as USCIS opens the application process and to protect vulnerable immigrant communities from fraudulent providers.

The budget should thus include substantial resources for a robust response from the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs and community organizations across NYC. Such a response would incorporate outreach and case preparation, public education, strong co-
ordination and collaboration, and a plan to link community providers and preparation to legal services once the injunction is lifted and the application process opens. NYC should provide $9 million in funding, under the direction of the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, for a collaborative citywide program capable of conducting outreach to hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers and fully preparing approximately over 37,000 potentially eligible New Yorkers to apply for administrative relief.

A proactive approach to administrative relief will be critical for immigrant New Yorkers like Magdalena Brito, a Bushwick resident and MRNY member who arrived in this country fifteen years ago. Since then, Magdalena has worked hard and made a life here with her family, but, since she was undocumented, she lived with the “fear that immigration authorities would separate me from my daughter and granddaughters, which would devastate and scare me.” Magdalena celebrated the President’s November announcement, but, like hundreds of thousands of others, needs information and support to apply once the process begins.

Second, NYC must renew its support for its pathbreaking DACA initiative (the original federal DACA program remains unaffected by the legal challenge to DAPA and expanded DACA). In 2013, the New York City Council invested $18 million over two years to support DACA literacy needs, with complementary outreach and legal support. This DACA Initiative has helped over 10,000 people access legal services and adult education, as well as gain work authorization and protection from deportation.

A key challenge for DACA enrollment citywide was that many immigrants did not know that enrollment in a municipally-funded adult literacy program, such as an ESOL or HSE class, could meet the education requirement associated with DACA. Currently, over 1.7 million New York City residents are Limited English Proficient (LEP) and/or lack a high school diploma or its equivalent. This lack of proficiency in English is a barrier both to DACA enrollment and to employment and economic mobility more generally.

The citywide DACA initiative built a network for adult literacy providers to connect with legal providers who could provide DACA-related services and support with application fees and helped raise New York State’s DACA enrollment rate by 15 percentage points. Following years of budget cuts, adult literacy programs were able to open new classes and respond to long waiting lists, while strengthening and building new partnerships with legal services organizations. Thousands of immigrant students learned English and built skills to navigate life in the U.S., mastering academic content, passing the High School Equivalency exam, and moving towards post-secondary education and employment.

With NYC funding for its DACA initiative slated to expire on June 30th, 2015, the Administration has proposed to redirect this funding largely for immigrant legal services, while cutting the literacy services by 80 percent. With the continuing need for DACA services, legal services should be expanded, but not at the expense of equally vital literacy services, which are in enormous need throughout NYC (see Table 3). Without renewing this adult literacy

Queens adult literacy class at MRNY. Such classes are at risk if funding is not renewed and increased.
funding, over 4,000 immigrant New Yorkers stand to lose access to essential adult education classes through community-based organizations and CUNY programs. To sustain and expand its DACA legal services and these critical literacy services, NYC should renew the DACA initiative and maintain critical investments in legal and outreach services, while investing and base-lining $7.5 million in adult literacy for immigrants and other adults who need to improve their skills to be able to access better jobs and support their families. This new investment would make up for the lost DACA literacy resources and expand the city’s adult education capacity by providing classes to over 6,000 New Yorkers. This is a modest investment that will yield enormous returns.

Third, the City Council’s Adult Literacy Initiative should also be renewed and expanded from $750,000 to $5 million to create additional seats to support the City’s workforce development reforms and assist individuals with language barriers to employment. With the City’s career pathways strategy8 emphasizing the use of “bridge programs” to help individuals transition from low skill levels to marketable credentials and “bridges” to the workforce, the Adult Literacy Initiative supports the programs and classroom seats that offer individuals the necessary pre-cursor: English language and basic skills instruction. Expanding the budget as proposed would support approximately 4,000 more New Yorkers gain essential literacy skills and access career ladder training and employment.

Table 3: Unmet ESL Needs9

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<tr>
<th>Current ESL Seats in NYC</th>
<th>29,000</th>
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<tr>
<td>Number of Limited-English Proficient Residents in NYC</td>
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MRNY member Mauricio Rocha demonstrates the great opportunities created when those essential literacy tools are provided. He immigrated to the United States in 2008 and found work as a busboy. In 2009, he enrolled in MRNY’s ESOL and HSE classes and received his High School Diploma in 2010. Mauricio stayed with MRNY to volunteer with the organization’s Adult Literacy and Legal departments, developing the professional and interpersonal skills required to thrive in a fast-paced NYC working environment. In 2012, he enrolled at LaGuardia Community College and graduated with a Business Administration degree. Mauricio now attends Baruch College and hopes to work in the non-profit sector full-time, so he can better help New York immigrants who struggle along the path on which he once tread.

Fourth, NYC must ensure that every immigrant facing detention has legal counsel. Over 60,000 immigrants face imminent deportation in NYC’s immigration courts – including thousands in detention. Many lack access to counsel, and the need for legal representation was only exacerbated this past summer following a surge in child refugees from Central America, with over 6,000 children relocated to the New York metropolitan area. NYC must increase access to counsel for all immigrants facing removal proceedings and must base-line programs that serve the most vulnerable including those who are detained, unaccompanied minors, and LGBTQ immigrants.

NYC made a historic move last year to fund the nation’s first institutionally-provided
universal representation program for detained immigrants facing deportation, the New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP). This program has dramatically increased the success rate of detained immigrants who cannot afford counsel and, should support be maintained, has the potential to improve the prospects of detained immigrants by 1000 percent. NYIFUP should be renewed at $4.9 million and base-lined in the budget to allow its success to continue and grow.

To address the legal needs of the over 6,000 child refugees who were settled in New York State after fleeing devastating violence, crime, and trauma in Central America during the summer of 2014, the City Council took significant action by creating the Unaccompanied Minors Initiative. This private-public partnership yielded $1.9 million to provide direct representation to children in their removal proceedings and referrals to social services. With $900,000 of the private funding set to expire at the end of 2015, NYC should fund and base-line $4 million to continue to support legal services to unaccompanied minors facing deportation.

There is also a dire need for NYC’s efforts to provide better access to counsel to include all those facing deportation, whether detained or not. Currently, for those who are non-detained, there is no dedicated funding stream to support their defense. Without legal representation, only 18 percent of non-detained individuals in removal proceedings have successful outcomes. With legal representation, these percentages increase to 74 percent. To narrow this gap, funds should be offered to support legal services for both detained and non-detained removal cases. NYC should thus also create an additional funding stream to provide free and high quality legal counsel to all immigrants in NYC immigration courts.

Immigration legal services support will be critical for immigrant New Yorkers like Francisca, a Salvadoran mother of three children who fled her country when gang members threatened to kill her and her children. Francisca, as well as her children later, were all detained at entry to the United States and put into deportation proceedings. Since then, two of Francisca’s children have won asylum through the help of lawyers from Central American Legal Assistance (CALA) in Brooklyn and the support of City Council’s Unaccompanied Minors Initiative. Francisca’s case, however, continues to be lost in immigration “limbo” where CALA lawyers are trying to rescue it. Dedicated funding to help adults like Francisca, as well as children in deportation proceedings is vital to make sure that families like hers, intact and living safely in New York for now, can stay that way.

LGBTQ immigrants also face considerable and additional legal hurdles in the immigration system, often lacking access to specialized legal services that can sensitively address the complexities of their cases. Agencies that are experts in identifying and securing the forms of relief particular to LGBTQ immigrants are under-resourced and cannot meet existing demand. As such, the budget should include $1 million dollars to fund specialized LGBTQ immigration services via local organizations citywide.

Finally, NYC must continue supporting the implementation of its path-breaking municipal identification program (IDNYC). In 2015, NYC launched the nation’s largest municipal ID program and has continued to pave the way for how municipalities can offer inclusionary policies and programs for residents to be more engaged, regardless of their immigration or gender identity. NYC should maintain funding levels for IDNYC to continue meeting demand and providing high quality service citywide, with an emphasis on language access and robust citywide outreach.
3. Strong Workforce

A strong workforce and an efficiently functioning labor market are vital to New York’s economy. With immigrants making up nearly half of the city’s labor force, NYC should make every effort to improve the productivity of immigrant workers by investing in educational and workforce development to ensure that worker rights are protected.

A critical component of building and supporting a strong workforce is protecting workers’ rights, which will help workers directly and create a level playing field for businesses. Across NYC, it has become clear that immigrant workers often face intolerable working conditions, as recent investigations of industries like carwashes and nail salons have made clear. NYC has recently taken strong steps for workers’ rights, including the passage of Paid Sick Leave, but much work remains. Wage theft remains an enormous problem for immigrant workers, and many immigrant workers continue to avoid reporting abuses due to fear of retaliation.

Take the story of Refugio Denicia, a Mexican immigrant and MRNY member, who, in his fifteen years in the carwash industry, has faced various abuses. Refugio and his colleagues at a Queens carwash, before trying to organize, were victims of wage theft—having not been paid overtime pay and wages for their full hours worked—and suffered health problems including respiratory and skin conditions, due to toxic materials in the workplace. Refugio notes, “Carwash workers like me witness many things that do us harm, and do harm to our environment, too.”

Several measures to protect workers’ rights for those like Refugio across the city bear mention. First, in the abuse-ridden carwash industry, NYC should allocate resources to ensure that carwash workers, many of whom are immigrants, know their rights throughout NYC. In addition, the budget should provide resources to ensure that sanctions are effectively meted out to unscrupulous carwash owners who do not comply with the law.

Second, NYC should expand its Human Rights Commission. This entity is critical for protecting immigrant workers from discrimination, and the budget should thus include the restoration of Human Rights Commission funding to $5 million to ensure that the rights of all are protected and that anti-discrimination protections are effectively enforced across NYC on grounds of national origin, as well as race, sexual orientation, and more.

Third, NYC’s Department of Consumer Affairs (DCA) should have the resources necessary to continue to advance its work on paid sick days and informing community members about their rights. In the past years, DCA has led efforts to conduct outreach to working New Yorkers about their rights and enforce the law when employers fail to comply. The
budget should include sufficient resources for DCA to be able to enforce workers’ rights on paid sick days and other related initiatives.

Fourth, given the myriad abuses that immigrant workers encounter, NYC should invest $1 million toward employment legal services for immigrants. Such a pilot initiative would enable NYC to expand the reach of community organizations, who are often at the front lines of detecting abuses and serving these populations.

Fifth, NYC should respond to the needs of the nearly 10,000 day laborers in New York City. They are mostly recently-arrived immigrant workers who congregate in public spaces, street corners, or Home Depot parking lots to access manual jobs such as construction, moving, landscaping, and house cleaning. Yet day laborers in New York City face daily, serious challenges. It is estimated that one in two day laborers has or will experience wage theft at some point. Sometimes workers are not paid at all for weeks, or even months, and in other cases they are paid below the legal minimum. These workers also face serious workplace accidents and hazards, including exposure to chemicals, dust and toxic emissions, use of faulty equipment, and lack of protective gear and safety equipment. NYC’s day laborers also lack workforce training, skills development, and needed health and safety training. To make matters worse, day laborers often go without access to basic infrastructure—for example, enduring extreme temperatures and lack of access to bathrooms. NYC can and should do better for its day laborers and can begin by strengthening the existing day laborer center network in Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island by committing to base-line $365,000 in the budget.

NYC must also do more in the area of workforce development. One key program has been the Jobs to Build On Initiative, which prepares and connects low-income community members to good jobs. NYC should renew funding of $5.5 million for the Jobs to Build On initiative to support the bilingual job readiness training, employment counseling, job placement, and retention support necessary for citywide workforce development.

In addition, NYC should expand funding to the Worker Cooperative Business Development initiative, which supports the growth of cooperative businesses. Such cooperatives provide a path for low-income and immigrant New Yorkers to access employment, build wealth, and gain entrepreneurial skills. NYC should allocate $2.34 million to enhance the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative to provide for the incubation of new worker cooperative small business, create employment opportunities for new worker-owners, assist existing cooperatives, and conduct outreach to cooperative entrepreneurs.

Finally, the City contracts out $5 billion in social services annually that are provided by a low-paid workforce, which is half immigrant and largely women of color, and should be compensated fairly. Half of these workers are paid less than $15 an hour. As a first step this year, NYC should increase funding in social service contracts to establish an $11.50 an hour wage floor for nonprofit sector workers, and provide a meaningful COLA for all social service workers. More than 10,000 workers would benefit from the wage floor. The City should also invest $5 million to develop a career ladder system for this workforce that will make it possible for lower-paid workers to acquire additional education and training, and access needed career counseling and child care supports to enable them to advance within the sector to positions of greater responsibility and compensation.
4. Policing and Restorative Justice

NYC has been in the national spotlight over its struggle to overcome decades of racially disparate and abusive policing. As the injustices over stop-and-frisk practices came to the fore in recent years, and as recent police killings of unarmed civilians like Eric Garner have shown, communities of color all too often become the victims of abusive policing—and, more broadly, of over-policing in their communities. This is an issue for communities of color throughout NYC, and it has a deep impact in immigrant communities. For immigrants, fear of the police is often increased by language access difficulties, and, for undocumented immigrants or those with undocumented relatives, concern about becoming ensnared in the immigration system—though it bears mention that NYC has made significant strides on both points through recent changes to public policy.

Immigrant groups have stood up against stop-and-frisk and, more recently, against broken windows policing because these policies affect them significantly. In the peak years of stop-and-frisk, approximately one of every three people (32 to 34 percent) who was stopped-and-frisked was Latino. While data on country of origin of people stopped by the police are not available, 41 percent of Latinos are immigrants across NYC. Moreover, black New Yorkers comprised more than half of the people stopped in the peak years of stop-and-frisk, and 32 percent of black NYC residents are immigrants.

Perhaps the clearest recent case of citywide abusive and disparate policing of immigrant communities has been the NYPD’s surveillance of Muslim communities, many of them also immigrant communities. As Human Rights Watch wrote, “The intelligence gathering was carried out solely on the communities’ religious or ethnic profile and not on suspicion of criminal activity.” This surveillance effort treated these communities as enemies of our city, subjecting them to substantial civil rights violations.

There have also been significant experiences of abusive policing in immigrant neighborhoods like Jackson Heights, where LGBTQ immigrants have suffered from “a disturbing and systemic pattern of police harassment, violence, and intimidation directed at LGBTQ community members,” including being profiled as sex workers and being physically abused.

One example of this disparate policing occurred to María, a transgender immigrant who was arrested in recent months after being accosted by a man on the street. After the man had made an unwanted advance on María and her friend and solicited sex from them, they refused. Police officers approached and, instead of protecting these two women, used condoms in María’s purse as evidence that she was a prostitute. Without listening to her account of what had happened, they put her in jail, where she was further harassed.

In short, immigrant communities across NYC have often borne the brunt of abusive and disparate policing, and they need NYC to both move forward with important reforms and change how it allocates resources to deal with crime. For this reason, NYC must consider robust reforms to the current system and develop holistic solutions that promote both the safety of our city as well as our immigrant communities, who need their wellbeing
to be weighed at every step given their greater vulnerability.

NYC should invest in youth opportunities and restorative justice practices in these communities. These initiatives would work with young people, who are all too often the target of criminal justice efforts, to provide them with opportunities to get onto a path to success.

The first priority for providing constructive opportunities for youth in immigrant communities and non-immigrant communities alike is to fully fund the Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP). This program provides young people with educational and work experiences that are immensely valuable to help them towards future employment. While SYEP has expanded recently, the program still turned away over 83,000 youth who applied. The cost of increasing the level of slots to 50,000 would be $21.5 million. To reach the goal of full summer youth employment for youth in our city, the cost would be $100 million.

In addition, it is of vital importance that NYC schools turn from criminalizing students to restorative justice. The best way to address the need for restorative justice and constructive approaches to working with young people is to implement a citywide Restorative Justice Coordinator Program, which would place a Restorative Justice Coordinator in 514 schools (431 High Schools and 83 Secondary Schools) throughout NYC. This would include ongoing training and coaching in Restorative Justice for all staff in 514 schools Funding for Youth and Parent outreach and engagement. The cost of this program would be $89.95 million, or $175,000 per school.

A complementary initiative towards restorative justice, through ensuring constructive spaces for youth, would be to expand the Student Success Centers (SSCs) to ten NYC schools. SSCs are one-stop-shops located within high schools where students can go at any time to work with trained peer leaders and partnering adult staff on the college application process. SSC peer leaders are trained to help their fellow students navigate every step of the college process and create school-wide “college-going cultures” across campuses. Middle School SSCs are youth-led centers that assist students with planning for the high school application process, careers, and higher education success. The cost of running SSCs at ten schools across NYC would be $500,000.
5. Affordable and Safe Housing

Access to well-maintained affordable housing is critical for the health and wellbeing of every New Yorker. Yet more and more residents of our city – particularly working-class immigrant New Yorkers – lack it. In fact, New Yorkers are spending much of their precious income on rent: today a whopping one in three households pays over half its income towards rent, often for apartments that lack consistent heat or need other basic repairs. In immigrant communities, the affordable housing crisis is even worse. Data show that immigrants have a higher rent burden (rent as a portion of their income) and are more likely than non-immigrants to live in overcrowded apartments. Immigrant households are also more likely to rely on rent-regulated housing as their only affordable option—at present, 50 percent of rent-regulated households are immigrant-headed (see Table Four).

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<th>Table 4: Rent Burdens, Overcrowding, and Rent-Regulated Housing for Immigrant NYC Residents¹⁸</th>
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<td>Median Rent Burden of All Immigrants</td>
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<td>Median Rent Burden of Low-Income Immigrants</td>
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<td>Median Rent Burden of all New Yorkers</td>
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<td>Percent of immigrant households living in overcrowded units</td>
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<td>Percent of all households living in overcrowded units</td>
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<td>Percentage of rent-regulated households that are immigrant-headed</td>
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This is a key moment for action. The rent laws, which protect 2.5 million residents in rent-regulated housing, are up for renewal in Albany this year, with pressure from the real estate industry to gut them. Moreover, NYC’s massive rezoning projects will likely exacerbate gentrification that often displaces immigrant New Yorkers. To be sure, NYC’s tenants need strong action in Albany, where the rent laws should be renewed and strengthened. But, in the meantime, NYC must also take strong action through its budget to preserve healthy and affordable housing.

To address the lack of affordable housing for immigrant residents, NYC must first ensure deep affordability in all new developments. This will require the allocation of resources to ensure that 50 percent of units in all new developments are affordable to low- and moderate-income New Yorkers, with a substantial portion of these units being affordable...
to low-income tenants (who earn as low as 30 percent of Area Median Income).

NYC should also expand resources for tenants facing displacement. Too often, tenants like Rosa Mendoza fail to receive the protections they need. Rosa, a 67 year-old Nicaraguan immigrant and MRNY member, has lived in Bushwick since 1981. As the neighborhood has gentrified, her landlord has failed to make critical repairs in her rent-regulated apartment, and the bathroom ceiling is now on the verge of falling in. Rosa notes, “He doesn’t fix anything because he wants me to leave and he’s told me to leave.” Already, the owner has bought or forced out tenants from three of the building’s six units, so that he could remodel them and charge market-rate rents. Now, he is trying to make things so difficult for her that she will leave, including a recent effort to more than double her rent. Rosa says, “I need the City to recognize this catastrophe and demand that my apartment is fixed.”

The first part of the solution to cases like Rosa’s citywide involves supporting both legal counsel for those tenants and community organizing to educate tenants about their rights. Of primary importance, NYC must ensure sufficient funding to guarantee a right to counsel for all New York tenants by allocating approximately $300 million for this purpose.

As NYC proceeds with rezoning efforts, it must also deliver on its promise of a $36 million anti-displacement legal services effort and $5 million for community organizing efforts, and expand both in proportion with new rezoning announcements. NYC should also allocate $13.5 million for anti-displacement efforts in areas affected by prior rezonings.

Community organizing is critical to ensure that tenants can come together for their own well-being and that individual tenants, who very rarely have resources to hire their own lawyers, can defend their rights effectively. NYC must therefore maintain the current funding levels of the Housing Preservation Initiative (HPI), a proven, successful program that currently funds neighborhood-based groups in 25 City Council districts to address key threats to affordable housing. HPI has a bottom-up strategy that allows each funded community to develop and implement an effective approach to stop the loss of affordable housing. Since its inception, HPI has been extremely successful in protecting affordable housing and promoting neighborhood stabilization in needy districts. The key to the success of HPI is its flexibility to support neighborhood groups in the development of strategic, grassroots-based solutions that directly address the particular threat to affordable housing in each community.

NYC should also ensure that poor housing conditions, which are endemic in working-class and immigrant neighborhoods, are repaired. Landlords in gentrifying neighborhoods commonly withhold repairs as a way to urge out low-income tenants and replace

Immigrant residents of Brooklyn prepare to march for affordable housing and against displacement.
them with higher-paying tenants. NYC can address this by taking three critical steps. First, NYC should maintain the funding level of the Alternative Enforcement Program. This vital initiative identifies the most distressed buildings in NYC and, if landlords fail to address violations, can result in emergency repairs, liens, and fees. The Alternative Enforcement Program must be funded at a level that enables it to continue to cover 250 buildings.

Second, NYC should expand the Emergency Repair program, a critical initiative that ensures that, when landlords fail to correct violations, HPD may take corrective action and charge the landlords, with potential tax liens if landlords fail to pay. Funding for the Emergency Repair Program initiative should be increased to ensure effective citywide enforcement. And, third, NYC should allocate resources to focus greater enforcement attention for repair of dangerous asthma-triggering underlying conditions within residents’ homes.
6. Education

Every New York family wants the best for its children and puts a very high premium on a good education. Unfortunately, too often immigrant New Yorkers, and particularly those of low- or moderate-income, have to send their children to lower-performing and under-reourced schools. Immigrant New York children often have to study in schools that are overcrowded, and immigrant families with limited-English proficiency (both among students and parents) have a more difficult time navigating the system and thriving.

In NYC, 41 percent of public school students speak a language other than English at home, and 13 percent are English Language Learners. Only 4 percent of English Language Learners meet state standards in English Language Arts and 14 percent meet standards in Math, and only a third graduate high school in four years. These students bring enormous strengths and also great needs that the school system often has not been equipped to meet.

NYC has taken steps forward through its language access policy and through a new community schools program that helps make schools a hub of service provision for families in need. But there is more work to be done to ensure that every child receives a high-quality public education. Below are key proposals to make that happen.

The story of Dionisia Romero, a mother in Corona and MRNY member, exemplifies the challenges faced by many immigrant families. Because of a lack of space in her district school, she had to send her six year-old son to a school in Long Island City—two hours by bus round-trip. And, due to the same overcrowding, those children who are attending school in the district often are forced to learn in trailers and, in many cases, have lunch before 10am because the school cannot accommodate their children. As Dionisia says, “this problem is not new, and we need more school construction now.”

NYC must take strong action to address overcrowding. NYC’s current capital plan goes a long way toward addressing that issue by building 33,000 seats, but there are still nearly 17,000 needed seats citywide that would not be funded. This sets up NYC children for a sub-standard education. The borough of Queens, and in particular the heavily immigrant communities of Elmhurst and Corona, have long been the site of the worst school overcrowding in NYC. This has resulted in children learning in unsafe trailers, hallways and other inappropriate spaces, eating lunch too early or too late to keep them nourished throughout the day, missing out on key enrichment activities like arts, music and sports, and many more sacrifices. In its upcoming budget, NYC should fully fund all of the 49,000 needed seats citywide. NYC should also allocate resources to create and coordinate a task force to address this major problem.

Parents offer input at the Kickoff event of the Bushwick Campus Community School, where MRNY is the lead community partner.
Second, NYC has led the way in implementing an exciting new community schools initiative for 128 schools, many of which are in high-needs school districts where immigrants often reside. This is an important step forward, and NYC should move forward with it. But the NYC budget must also include key items to make this system work, including $40 million for expanded learning time and summer programs, $5 million for parent engagement and $20 million for teams of expert teachers and principals in the lowest-performing schools, which often have high percentages of English Language Learners, but very little professional expertise in properly educating and supporting these students. It is also critical that small grassroots community organizations with essential cultural and linguistic competencies be welcomed as partners in this important effort.

Third, NYC must dedicate resources towards building parent leadership and engagement in schools. Many immigrant parents do not have access to the information and support they need to advocate for their children and navigate the massive and complex school system. There are model parent engagement programs in districts across the country that have been effective at training and engaging immigrant parents, tapping their skills and talents to support their schools, and thus raising student achievement. NYC should create a $5 million Parent Engagement Innovation Fund to pilot some of those successful programs here in NYC. In addition, for all parents to be partners in their children’s education, we call on the Department of Education to ensure that parents have full access to quality translation and interpretation. The NYC budget should include new funding for Language Line and outreach. This is not enough, however, to address major barriers that families continue to face even though services are technically available. NYC should designate District-level Language Access Coordinators to provide more support for schools and monitoring to ensure parents are being connected with quality services.

Finally, NYC should move quickly to expand its free school lunch program. Last year, NYC implemented a pilot initiative in middle schools to provide free school lunches, which can ensure that more students are eating during the day and do away with the poverty stigma that can surround school lunch. NYC should now invest $20 million to expand its free school lunch program to all New York City public school students.
7. Access to Health Care

Although implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) has meant important progress in coverage and access for some NYC immigrants, glaring gaps in access and coverage remain. Immigrants often do not know about rights to language access. Many qualified immigrants are confused about coverage opportunities through the New York State of Health (NYSOH) or have not enrolled due to misinformation about the immigration consequences. Furthermore, undocumented immigrants are explicitly barred from purchasing health insurance through the NYSOH. While those granted administrative relief through President Obama’s newly-announced programs can get state-funded Medicaid if they meet income eligibility, those who make above the income limits for Medicaid will have no affordable coverage options.

The data in Table 6 show one key facet of the health coverage disparities facing immigrant New Yorkers. Immigrants are nearly three times as likely than native-born residents to lack health insurance, non-citizen immigrants are more than four times as likely than native-born residents to lack health insurance, and undocumented immigrants are nearly seven times as likely than native-born residents to lack health insurance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Percentage without Health Insurance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Population</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Born Population</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants (All Statuses)</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naturalized Immigrants</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Citizen Immigrants</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undocumented Immigrants</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NYC’s immigrants deserve better. In particular, immigrant communities need robust outreach efforts that engage their residents in linguistically and culturally-competent ways, as well as a new approach that includes undocumented immigrants and provides them with safe, quality and affordable health care.

Given that the limited Navigator funding from the state is specifically targeted for enrollment and cannot adequately support all the education, outreach, and post-enrollment activities needed in a diverse and vibrant city like New York, NYC should allocate $5 million for the Access Health NYC Initiative. This initiative would support community-based organizations (CBOs). CBOs are trusted, culturally competent messengers to whom immigrants and other hard-to-reach, underserved populations look for information about public health.
programs and benefits and to provide education to the public about their health care rights to secure insurance low-cost care, and how to use their newly acquired coverage. Close to 80 percent of the funds should be re-granted to CBOs to conduct training and support education and outreach throughout the city and to provide consumer assistance to New York City residents. Supporting this network of CBOs will help ensure that thousands of New York City’s immigrants can learn about their health care coverage options and enroll in the most appropriate option and successfully use their coverage once enrolled.

Members of the People’s Budget Coalition and the New York Immigration Health Collaborative rally for Access Health NYC.
8. Civic Engagement

With 37 percent of NYC’s residents being foreign-born and over 60 percent speaking a language other than English at home, NYC has the opportunity to fully engage newcomers from all over the globe in our civic and electoral processes. While NYC has been a leader in engaging its residents civically, the city must do more to engage its newest New Yorkers and ensure the creation and expansion of programs to holistically integrate all residents. Engaging New Americans in the electoral process offers a unique opportunity to fundamentally change the dynamics of civic engagement in NYC. After all, a majority of foreign-born New Yorkers are US citizens, and are thus mostly eligible to vote.22

Challenges faced by New Americans in the process to vote and engage civically are seen in examples like that of Mr. Lee, a resident of Flushing, Queens contacted by the MinKwon Center for Community Action. Mr. Lee had registered to vote in March of 2014. But when he went to vote last November, Mr. Lee was told he filled out the form incorrectly. There was no Korean translator, so he did not understand the poll workers’ explanation about why his ballot was incorrect. Confused and flustered, Mr. Lee gave the form back and left.

First, NYC should invest in getting immigrant voters registered. Community organizations across NYC have successfully registered hundreds of thousands of new Americans to vote. In the 2012 presidential election in NYC, more than half of the potentially eligible voters had an immigrant background, with nearly one third being naturalized foreign-born people.23 (See Table 6 for data on potential immigrant voters). NYC must invest in this infrastructure to ensure that eligible immigrants have the information to register and participate. NYC already possesses a strong existing network of immigrant-serving organizations across New York poised to register tens of thousands of voters in communities, at naturalization ceremonies, and with business partners to significantly expand voter registration across NYC. NYC should invest $1 million to engage, educate, activate, and mobilize 75,000 immigrant residents to become more fully integrated into their communities’ civic fabric and help foster a deeper democracy. The funding should be distributed throughout immigrant-serving organizations across the five boroughs.

Table 7: Immigrant Voters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Immigrants Eligible to Vote (Naturalized Citizens 18 and Older)</th>
<th>1.61 Million</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Immigrants Eligible to Vote Who Report Not Being Registered</td>
<td>350,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Second, NYC should support the expansion of immigrant participation in Participatory Budgeting (PB). Immigrant participation is critical to the success of PB, an exciting new initiative that enables community members to determine how City funding is allocated. While PB has already proven quite successful with NYC support, it is critical that the initiative further engages immigrant communities that have traditionally been excluded from local decision-making, either because they lack English proficiency or immigration status, or are culturally unfamiliar with civic processes. NYC should allocate $500,000 to engage immigrant communities in participatory budgeting.

MRNY member José Vallejo became a citizen and registered to vote. Many more immigrant NYC residents are eligible.
Sources

1Fiscal Policy Institute analysis of 2013 American Community Survey data.

2Make the Road New York and the New York Immigration Coalition also thank their colleagues at the Fiscal Policy Institute, the Coalition for Asian American Children and Families, and the Center for Urban Research (at The Graduate Center, CUNY) for their help in providing data for, and reviewing drafts of, this report.

3“Base-lining” refers to using current funding levels as the “baseline” for establishing future funding requirements in subsequent budgets.

4Fiscal Policy Institute analysis of 2013 American Community Survey data.


6Ibid.


8MPI report.


11Francisca’s last name is not provided in order to protect her.


14Stop-and-frisk data come from a New York Civil Liberties Union analysis, accessible here: http://www.nyCLU.org/content/stop-and-frisk-data. Data on the percentage of racial and ethnic groups who are immigrants come from an analysis of 2013 American Community Survey data by the Fiscal Policy Institute.


This name is a pseudonym to protect her.


Data from the New York City Department of Education (DOE), 2014, provided by the NYC Coalition for Educational Justice.


U.S. Census Bureau, 2011 American Community Survey; Passel, Jeffrey. “The Size and Characteristics of the Unauthorized Migrant Population in the US: Estimates based on the March 2005 Current Population Survey.” Pew Hispanic Center March 17, 2006. These data were compiled before the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The authors were unable to find New York City-specific data from after its implementation. Given that the ACA excludes undocumented immigrants from most types of protections, however, we expect that newer data will demonstrate similar disparities in access.

November 2012 Current Population Survey Voter Supplement data for New York City analyzed by John Mollenkopf, Center for Urban Research, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

Ibid.

Ibid.