

Statement by Commissioner Nisha Agarwal

A former mayor of New York City once referred to the diversity of the population as a “gorgeous mosaic”. New York City would not be the city it is today without the immigrant communities who live and work here. About 37% of NYC residents are foreign-born. If you include their children, about 60% of New York City residents are immigrants or children of immigrants. Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs serves as a bridge between immigrant New Yorkers and city government. We work to promote policies and programs that enable the well- being of these communities, with a special focus on reducing economic disparities, as that is a key tenet of Mayor de Blasio’s administration.

One such policy is our municipal identification program, called “IDNYC”. This free card allows access into all city buildings, such as schools and hospitals. It can be used as a library card and as proof of identification at some financial institutions. Cardholders also receive discounts to cultural institutions such as museums and theaters. We do not ask for anyone’s immigration status when they sign up for the card- we only ask for proof of identity and proof of residency. This allows anyone to sign up for it- and in fact over 560,000, (8% of the population of NYC) have signed up. The entire city benefits from this card, as other people who may have had difficulty getting government identification such as elderly people, youth, and homeless individuals can also apply for it.

Language access is another point where we can be proactive about immigrant integration. We believe that every resident of NYC has a right to interact with the government in a language that they can understand. This goes beyond translating government materials, it also means ensuring accountability within city government. We now have the first ever language access director who is tasked with working with each agency to create a plan for making their materials and processes accessible to all New Yorkers. We want immigrant communities to be a priority in all aspects of city government.

To this end, we are working across agencies with other initiatives as well. For example, we recently worked with the City Council to launch an initiative to

encourage undocumented immigrants to use health centers as their source of primary care, rather than going to emergency care rooms. We have been working with libraries and schools to provide more services and information for those eligible to become citizens. We are also working with leaders of immigrant communities to both understand their needs and help them tap into resources from city government. We recently did a listening tour of different immigrant communities where we went to community meetings to hear their concerns. The results of this listening tour are being analyzed to inform our next steps. We also just celebrated the graduation of our first class of fellows as part of the Immigrant Women's Leadership Program. These women are journalists, directors of nonprofit organizations, and doctors who have been working for the betterment of their communities. We worked with them to put them in touch with more tools, and they will serve as part of the Women's Cabinet- an advisory body for the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs.

In sum, our efforts toward immigrant integration are multifaceted and involve many different stakeholders. New York City is a vibrant city, and flourishes when all of the smaller communities within the city flourish. We work with other agencies and with those communities to ensure the wellbeing of all NYC residents.