

TRINITY CHURCH WALL STREET

Trinity Church Testimony - City Council Committee on The Whole

Tuesday, December 20, 2022 | **Subject:** Examining the City's Response & Delivery of Services to Migrants

Dear Speaker Adams, Deputy Speaker Ayala, and members of the New York City Council.

My name is Natasha Lifton and I am the Director of Government Relations at Trinity Church Wall Street. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to submit testimony for this important hearing and for all of your efforts to ensure that the City is supporting the recently arrived migrants. This testimony provides updates on efforts Trinity Church has undertaken to support asylum seekers arriving in New York City, as well as recommendations for additional steps the Administration and City Council should take to better meet their needs.

Trinity Church Wall Street is an Episcopal Church in Lower Manhattan with a congregation of more than 1,600 parishioners who represent all five boroughs and form an ethnically, racially, and economically diverse congregation. In addition to our ministry, we carry out our mission of faith and social justice through direct services, grantmaking, and advocacy.

Guided by the teachings of our faith, Trinity Church has remained steadfast in our commitment to supporting the thousands of migrant families and individuals who have arrived over the past year, doing our part to support their overall well-being as they adjust to life in New York City. This includes providing over **\$2 million in funding to 22 community-based organizations** serving recently arrived asylum seekers citywide. Our grantees, including African Communities Together, Bailey House, Center for Urban Community Services, Coalition for the Homeless, Bronx Community Foundation and Hour Children, are providing shelter, access to health care, education, and other services. In addition, Trinity has distributed over \$500,000 in supplies such as clothing, feminine hygiene products, and toys to community-based organizations directly serving these families and individuals.

Our grantee partners have developed innovative solutions to address the needs of asylum seekers:

- The **Girl Scout Council of Greater New York** is expanding its successful Troop 6000 program to serve asylum seekers between the ages of 5 and 17 housed in the Row NYC Hotel.

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- The **Interfaith Center of New York** is coordinating houses of worship across all faiths to develop a network of overnight emergency shelters for newly arrived migrants.
- **New Alternatives for LGBTQ+ Homeless Youth** is using their space near the Port Authority Bus Terminal as a first stop for LGBTQ+ asylum seekers.

We appreciate the Administration's efforts to respond to this crisis, including partnering with these and other community organizations and converting over 40 hotels to serve as emergency shelters. And we commend the Mayor's recent announcement of "[Promise NYC](#)" to provide child care subsidies for migrant families and other households with undocumented children.

However, we believe additional steps must be taken to address the physical, psychological, and economic well-being of these new New Yorkers more fully.

1. **Housing - Expedite access to housing and reduce the overall shelter population:**
 - a. Lift the "90-day rule" and ensure providers receive clear, consistent guidance about this change so recipients of CityFHEPS vouchers can leave shelter and secure permanent housing faster.
 - b. Advocate for the Governor and State Legislature to enact legislation ([S2804B/A3701](#)) to create the Housing Assistance Voucher Program, which would provide housing subsidies to those ineligible for other housing programs.
 - c. Make the Fair Chance for Housing Act law so individuals with criminal records living in shelters can find housing.
2. **Employment - Advocate for Congress and the Biden Administration to enact legislation that would permit asylum seekers to legally work immediately in the United States.**
3. **Legal and Social Services - Expand legal and other supports for asylum seekers:**
 - a. Immediately release the \$6.7 million allocated in New York City's FY23 budget to increase interpretation and translation services through the creation of language cooperatives and a citywide interpreter bank.
 - b. Allocate \$10 million to fund emergency immigration legal services.
 - c. Provide an additional \$10 million to shelter operators for culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate wraparound services using trauma-informed approaches.

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- d. Create and fund an initiative—in partnership with New York City social work schools—to enable service providers, including small community-based organizations, to hire, train, and retain social workers.
4. **Education - Meet the educational and emotional needs of newly arrived migrant children:**
- a. Invest \$4 million to expand the successful Linking Immigrant Families with Early Childhood Education Project to help immigrant families enroll their children in Pre-K.
 - b. Provide schools with funding to hire and retain additional school counselors, social workers, and English as a New Language teachers.
 - c. Ensure the DOE places newcomer youth in schools with staff best equipped to meet their needs such as those that have bilingual mental health supports, English as a New Language teachers, and ability to connect them to immigrant-serving community organizations, prioritizing schools in their new neighborhoods.
 - d. Call on the State to claim the Public Education Exemption under the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant for all state-funded applicable early care and education programs to guarantee access for all children, regardless of citizenship status.

Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to submit testimony.